THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

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THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

The Passion of Our Lord

BY

HIS EMINENCE

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TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

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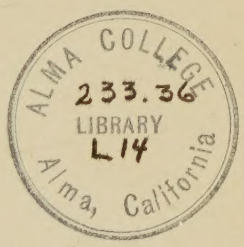

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

To all the Reverend Clergy of the Suburban Diocese of Sabina:

These considerations on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, published at various times in the *Diocesan Bulletin*, I now present, collected in this small volume, to my dear priests, in order that it may serve them conveniently for their spiritual advantage and for the welfare of the souls committed to their care.

The Passion of Our Blessed Lord, like the great Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, is an inexhaustible fountain of holy thoughts, of salutary meditations and of innumerable graces. In its consideration one finds an incomparable nourishment for every kind of virtue.

How can anyone fail to love Our Blessed Lord, and in Him, also, our neighbor, when he beholds the Son of God in the midst of all His sufferings and sacrifices for our redemption and salvation? St. Paul writes, He "delivered Himself for me," (Galatians II, 20) and every one of us can repeat with the great Apostle: — Christ the Lord was sacrificed for my salvation; and he will naturally add those other words of St. Paul: — "Who, therefore, shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

What a source of eternal hope to all of us is the thought that the Eternal Father spared not His Only Begotten Son, but gave Him for the salvation of every one of us and with Him gave to us every good gift! (Romans VIII, 32.)

It is true, indeed, that the Apostles and some of His disciples in Jerusalem, seeing Christ in such complete abjection, felt their faith shaken; and yet in so many ways His divinity was revealed, even in His Passion, by the verification of the prophecies, by the palpable realization of those predictions which revealed the true Messias, and by those superhuman prodigies which accompanied the Passion and the Death of the Man God. Even the great infidel Rousseau was forced to exclaim: "If the death of Socrates is worthy of a philosopher, the death of Jesus Christ is worthy of a God."

To us the consideration of the Passion of Our Blessed Lord becomes only a more convincing argument to fortify our faith, not less than the great miracles that He wrought during His public life. As Tertullian writes: "The crown of glory covers His Wounds, the palm of triumph veils His Blood, His victory was greater than His Wounds." And so as we come down from Calvary we shall strike our breasts and exclaim with the Roman centurion: "Truly this was the Son of God!"

How many were the virtues great and noble which shone forth in the Passion of the Saviour! The Fathers of the Church called the Cross of Christ the Chair of the Divine Master. Prudence, fortitude, patience, obedience and resignation to the Divine Will; compassion for sinners and at the same time the severity of justice towards the obstinate — all these virtues shine out from the consideration of the Divine Passion in such a way as to fascinate us and confound us.

From the Passion the Martyrs and the Saints of old

gained the wonderful courage of spirit which made them great even in the sight of their persecutors. In the Passion of the Divine Redeemer they beheld every great model. From it they took their courage. They fortified their own human frailty to win the victory of virtue. From the Passion they gathered the graces which made them Saints. It is always Christ who conquers in His Martyrs, in His disciples, in every faithful soul. He is the first Martyr of the New Law.

The writings of those who have studied the Passion of Our Blessed Lord are innumerable. As St. Leo the Great says in his sermon on the Passion: "The very material for pious consideration, although ineffable in itself, compels us to speak, and no matter how much we write or speak of the Passion of Christ we never can say enough."

The present study is an historical narration of the events of the Divine Passion. We have taken care to harmonize the various texts of the Evangelists and we have arranged the succession of events in the method most conformable to the traditions of the Fathers, with reflections upon the conditions and the localities where was enacted the Divine Tragedy. Naturally we have not omitted, as occasion demanded, to make some obvious and pious reflections.

My beloved priests, may this modest little book be useful to you for the sanctification of your souls and of all the souls of the faithful committed to your care. I offer it, whatever may be its value, to the greater glory of God.

(Signed) G. Card. De Lai,
Bishop of Sabina.

Rome, Feast of the Epiphany, 1921.

His Eminence, Cardinal De Lai,

Rome.

Your Eminence: —

I read your book on "The Passion" soon after receiving it from Your Eminence. It made immediately an unusual appeal. I had naturally read other books on the same sublime and moving subject, but your method of consideration was new to me and made a lasting impression.

When, just a year ago, I left for the Conclave, I put as usual a few books into my valise, as good companions on a long journey. Among them was your precious volume.

My return voyage happened to be in the latter part of Lent, so the time was opportune for a leisurely re-reading of "The Passion." Each chapter developed new impressions of scenes that were old as Christianity. It seemed, in short, that I realized now more than ever before the value of profound and studious meditation on these wonderful scenes, which sum up vitally the whole doctrine and work of Christ.

We had no book just like this in English. Why should our faithful people here be deprived of the fruits of your labor? Then came the decision to translate it, if I could get the necessary leisure. That I have not yet found, but

between many tasks I seized a little time, and to-day I finished it.

The translation is not literal. No translation can be and still render the underlying spirit which is the chief value. I trust, however, it has interpreted that spirit — profound yet facile; learned yet clear; devotional yet not merely emotional.

The task was not so easy as might at first appear. Different languages represent different modes. Many expressions which are perfectly graceful and natural in one tongue utterly lose flavor in another. No translation can do justice to the original text.

In the quotations from the Bible throughout the book, instead of adhering literally to the Douay Version, I have followed Your Eminence's Italian translation from the Vulgate.

I feel that your precious book, written in Italian and given to me by Your Eminence over a year ago, and now returned to you in English dress, will serve in a small way to express my affection and reverence for the learned and able author, widen the field of your labors and bring to a larger congregation of the faithful the precious and consoling message of Your Eminence's reflections on Christ's Passion.

Your Eminence's humble servant,

W. Card. O'Connell.

Boston, *January 25*, 1923.

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

815
730
GAREB
783
784
Calvary
Valley·Rabâbi
770
House
768
690
Valley of
BOUNDARIES OF THE CITY IN THE TIME OF OUR LORD
WALL OF AGRIPPA AND HADRIAN

JERUSALEM
AND
ENVIRONS
GRAPHIC SCALE
100 200 300 METERS
SCOPUS
Valley of Josaphat
720
768
Brook Cedron
793
MT. OF OLIVES
Gethsemane
Place of Ascension
828
ANTONIA
696
Mt Moria
TEMPLE
743
V. of Josaphat
725
OPHEL
Village of Siloam
664
630
735
MT · OF OFFENCE
Tophet
600
N
W
E

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

CHAPTER I

TOPOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF JERUSALEM

It will naturally be easier to follow the story of the Passion if one has under his eyes the topography of the holy places, at least in a general way. Our Blessed Lord on the Feast of the Palms, seeing from Mount Olivet the sacred city, wept over it even before entering through its gates. So we, before entering upon the meditations of the Sacred Passion, may cast our eyes over the city "which kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it," and as we gaze we, too, shall see it through a mist of tears.

Jerusalem is situated on the high plateau of Palestine about seven hundred meters above the level of the sea. It is surrounded by mountains in such a way as to form an immense quadrangle, in the midst of which rises the sacred city. To the north is Mount Scopus, to the east is Olivet, to the west is Gareb, with Calvary at its extremity, and finally, to the south is the Mount of Evil Council. From Mount Scopus to the city runs a wide plain over three miles in length, which offers easy access to Jerusalem. In fact, from this side the sacred city has always been attacked by her enemies. From this side the Romans, the Turks, and the Crusaders always began

their assaults upon the walls of the city, that being the weakest and most accessible side.

For this reason King David, in building a wall around the city, took care to strengthen it especially on that side. For the same reason the Kings Ezechias and Manasses constructed a second and wider wall outside the wall of David, and this was still standing in the time of Our Blessed Lord. Later still, King Agrippa, to fortify still more the defense of the city, added to the two walls already described a third one, which included Calvary, until then, just outside the Holy City. Such is the exterior aspect of Jerusalem on its north side.

To the east and west of the city are two chains of hills, separated from the holy city by two narrow, steep valleys which meet on the south, making there a deep plain, beyond which is the Mount of Evil Council. As one looks towards the city from the south, west, and east, it appears like a great castle constructed on the summit of high hills, inaccessible to assault from every side except the north.

The valley to the west was originally called "the Valley," without further distinction, possibly because it is narrower and more precipitous than the others. Later it was called by the Hebrews the Valley of Ge-hinnom, from which is derived the Gehenna of the Bible. Beginning at the foot of Calvary, it descends rapidly, stretching out to the Mount of Evil Council. There it opens out to form the southern plain. On the side of the Mount of Evil Council is the celebrated Haceldama, the field of blood bought by Judas' thirty pieces of silver.

The valley to the east of Jerusalem is also narrow and deep. It is called the Valley of Josaphat, along the bottom of which runs the torrent Cedron which separates Jerusalem from Mount Olivet. Beyond Cedron, on the lower slope of Olivet, is the Garden of Gethsemane. There still grow very ancient olive trees which perhaps witnessed the Agony of Our Blessed Lord. The Garden is near the bottom of the valley, and one still sees there the traces of the ancient arch through which one passed to the summit of Olivet. At the foot of this mountain the Redeemer began His Sacred Passion. Upon its summit, having conquered death and the humiliation of the Cross, He crowned the glory of His Resurrection by His Ascension into Heaven.

Jerusalem itself is not constructed on a level surface. Tasso thus describes it:

> "Gerusalem sovra due colli e posta,
> D' impari altezza, e volt i fronte a fronte.
> Va per lo mezzo suo valle interposta,
> Che lei distingue, e l' un dall' altro monte."

This stanza of Tasso describes exactly the situation of the city. Two small hills parallel with the two lateral valleys, separated from each other by a wide depression between them, where the lower city was built, form the location of Jerusalem. In ancient times, between these lateral hills, rising out of the intermediate depression was a small hill, which in the time of the Machabees formed the acropolis, which served for a place of refuge to the Syrians in the time of Simon Machabee. This same Simon, after having dislodged them, destroyed the acropolis and lev-

eled the small hill on which it stood, that no fortress menacing to the city and temple might be built upon it.

The western hill of Jerusalem is called Sion. There was the ancient tower of the Jebusites. After David had captured this stronghold, he made it his capital city, "Civitas David," and fortified it with strong walls. This is the highest hill of the city, reaching to about seven hundred and seventy meters above the level of the sea. There were situated the house of Annas, the high priest, the house of Caiphas, and also the Cenacle.

What emotions these names create in us! In the Cenacle Our Blessed Lord gathered His Apostles for the Last Supper. There, after His Resurrection, He visited His little terrified group, filling them at last with joy and love. There, after His Ascension, He gathered the first nucleus of His Church just born, and there again, after ten days, descended the Spirit of God in the form of fiery tongues. No wonder the first Christians and the pilgrims of the first centuries of Christianity held that place in the highest veneration and gave it the name of Holy Sion!

St. Epiphanius narrates that, upon the visit of Hadrian to Jerusalem in the year 135, the Christians possessed still the little church constructed on the site of the Cenacle where the Apostles were united in prayer after the ascent of Our Blessed Lord. St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, in his catechetical instructions, still extant, tells the faithful of the Holy City in his time, that Divine Providence had preserved the Cenacle where the Holy Spirit had descended upon the Apostles. The Crusaders restored this holy place.

To-day it is in the hands of the Turks, who venerate it as the burial place of King David. And so these ancient walls, which have seen so many wonderful mysteries, guarded faithfully even by the infidels, still exist. No wonder that the Christian visiting this sacred spot is deeply touched by the sentiment which comes to him at being so near to the supernatural and the divine!

The intermediate valley, which Josephus Flavius terms the "wide valley," is called the Tyropœon. The hill towards the east is Moria, probably the place where Abraham led his son Isaac to offer him in sacrifice to the Lord. This hill Moria rises gradually from the south towards the north, whereas Sion rises, on the contrary, from the north to the south. The lower part of Moria was called Ophel, the part of the city occupied in Our Lord's time by the servants and workmen of the temple, who were as a rule very friendly and some of them eager followers of the Nazarene.

From Ophel, mounting towards the north, there is the large level place of the temple. It was the ancient threshing floor of Ornan, where David saw the angel with his sword unsheathed above Jerusalem in the days of the great pestilence. Later Solomon erected there his great temple, which, rebuilt, was at the time of Our Blessed Lord a wonderful succession of porticoes, courtyards, fountains, and gardens, with rooms for the priests.

In the midst of all these were the "Sanctum" and the "Sanctum Sanctorum." The temple itself, surrounded on three sides by strong walls and on the east side by the wall of the city, was, besides being a sacred place, a

formidable fortress. Titus, to take it, was obliged to attack it during many long weeks of battle. Onward to the north, contiguous to the temple, upon a rocky elevation, Herod the Great built his castle called Antonia, which Josephus Flavius describes as of wonderful magnificence, strength and luxury.

At the time of Our Blessed Lord the Governor of Judea was accustomed to reside there on the occasion of the great feast days, at which time he came up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem to see that public order was preserved. Around about the castle Antonia were the quarters of the Roman cohorts, and here, therefore, happened those sad scenes of the trial by Pilate.

Having thus before our eyes a general plan of the city and its surroundings, and thus being enabled the better to follow the story with precision, let us come to the narrative of the sad event itself.

CHAPTER II

THE LAST SUPPER

On the evening of 14th Nisan, corresponding most probably to our 24th of March, of the year 29, Our Blessed Lord came with the twelve Apostles from Bethany to Jerusalem and ascended Sion to the Cenacle. There Peter and John, directed by Jesus, had made all the necessary preparations for the ritual supper of the Passover, according to the prescriptions of the Jewish law.

Judas at the Washing of the Feet

There can be no doubt that among the Apostles who gathered around Our Lord in the Cenacle there was the traitor Judas. That the Divine Master had full cognizance of the whole plan which was passing in Judas' brain is equally certain, and this, prescinding from His divine knowledge and also from the prediction of the betrayal, made more than a year before at Capharnaum, on the occasion of the promise of the Eucharist.

When the paschal lamb had been eaten with all the solemnity of the Jewish rite, and when the psalms and the hymns prescribed had been recited and sung, the Divine Master then prepared for the institution of the New Pasch, of which the ancient Passover was but a figure. He began by washing the feet of the Apostles, thus described by the Apostle St. John (xiii, 2 *et seq.*):

"And when supper was done (the devil having now put

into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him), knowing that the Father had given Him all things into His hands and that He came from God and goeth to God, He riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments, and having taken a towel, girded Himself, and began to wash the feet of the disciples." Coming to Peter last, the Apostle, reluctant to allow his Blessed Master to perform such a humble service for him, begged Our Lord to desist; but Christ conquered his repugnance with these memorable words: "If I wash thee not thou shalt have no part with Me." Peter, having yielded to the tender invitation of Christ, allowed Him to wash his feet, and then Christ exclaimed: "You are clean, but not all." And St. John expressly notes that Our Blessed Lord said this, because He knew that there was one there who would betray Him. It is clear from this that Judas was present at the washing of the feet.

Judas at the Institution of the Eucharist

Seated again at table, the Divine Master gave to His Apostles various salutary admonitions relating to the sublime act of humility and charity just performed by Him. And then St. John continues: "He was troubled in spirit, and He testified and said: 'Amen, Amen, I say to you, one of you shall betray Me.'"

Then follows the painful scene in which the Apostles sought to learn who should be the traitor. Peter begged John, who was nearest to Christ at table, to ask the Master the traitor's name, and Christ replied: "He it is to whom I shall reach bread dipped." "And when He had

dipped the bread He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the morsel, Satan entered into him and Jesus said to him: 'That which thou dost, do quickly.'" From this narration of St. John it is clear that Judas, after the washing of the feet, went back to his place at the table, and only after he had received the dipped bread, "intinctum panem," he went out to fulfill his nefarious plan.

The question arises: Was Judas also present at the institution of the great Sacrament of the Eucharist, and did he dare to partake of it? St. John does not say so expressly, but leaves it to be supposed, because he indicates that after the washing of the feet Judas returned to his place at the table. Now it is admitted by all that that was the solemn moment of the divine institution of the great Sacrament of Love.

Besides this, St. Luke evidently alludes to the presence of Judas at the Eucharist. Thus he writes: "And taking bread, He gave thanks, and brake and gave to them, saying, 'This is My Body which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of Me.' In like manner the chalice also, after He had supped, saying, 'This is the chalice, the new testament in My Blood which shall be shed for you. But yet behold the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table, and the Son of Man indeed goeth according to that which is determined, but yet woe to that man by whom He shall be betrayed!'"

Our Blessed Lord, therefore, after having distributed the Eucharist, lamented the fact that the traitor took part in the Eucharist. There can, therefore, be no doubt

that Judas was present at the institution of the Blessed Sacrament and that he guiltily partook of it.

In the sermon of St. Leo the Great on the Passion we read the following words: "Why do you not confide in the goodness of Him Who did not repel you from the communion of His Body and did not deny you the kiss of peace?" In like manner St. Augustine writes: "To all the Apostles the Lord distributed the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and among them was Judas, as St. Luke clearly narrates." St. John Chrysostom and St. Thomas Aquinas hold similar views, and Benedict XIV quotes in the same sense St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Jerome, and many other doctors and theologians.

It is true there are some to whom it is repugnant to admit that Our Blessed Lord would communicate Himself to the traitor, and who strive by various means to sustain their point of view. But, abominable certainly as was the act of Judas, it cannot be concluded from that, that Christ impeded it. Did He not wash his feet? Did He not later, at the culmination of Judas' perfidy, allow him to kiss Him and embrace Him? Indeed, did not Our Blessed Lord see then, and has He not seen throughout all the ages since, the horrible sacrileges and the innumerable outrages offered to this Sacrament? But all this did not serve to turn Him from His supreme act of love.

He was the Saviour of the world, and He wished to be in the midst of men, no matter what humiliations, neglect, or offenses He foresaw. Master as He was, and Father of the apostolic family, He did not wish to reveal until the last moment the ignominy of Judas. Indeed, He

wished to give even to him the most extreme proof of His Divine love, that He might endeavor to save him.

But for all this the treachery of Judas cruelly wounded the Heart of Jesus. Indeed, He thus began to taste the bitterness of the chalice of His Passion. More than a year before at Capharnaum He grieved publicly, speaking to the Apostles: "Have I not chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?" And many centuries before David had expressed the same indignation and grief for the treachery he foresaw: "For if my enemy had reviled me I would verily have borne with it . . . but Thou . . . my guide and my familiar, Who didst take sweetmeats together with me: in the house of God, we walked with consent." But for all prophecy and prediction nothing availed to change the heart of Judas, not even the threat which he heard from the lips of Christ Himself: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed! It were better for him if that man had not been born."

How horrible is the hardness of heart of the miserable man whom passion blinds and then leads to awful destruction! On the other hand, behold the sweetness, the mercy, and the long suffering of Christ; how He sought by every means, even by washing the feet of Judas, to save him from his own dreadful stubbornness. But before such obstinacy, such blindness of passion, such insane avarice for money, everything is useless, everything is vain. How terrible the lesson for all who allow themselves to be dominated by the passions!

But let us now leave the traitor, who goes quickly to fulfill his horrible plan, and let us return for a moment to the Cenacle.

CHAPTER III

THE LAST SUPPER

In the Cenacle

When Judas departed from the Cenacle, it was already night, as St. John clearly says. It must have been, therefore, about seven o'clock in the evening, because, towards the end of March, the time of the Passion, the sun sets about six o'clock.

After the traitor had left the room, Christ, as if relieved of this incubus, began to speak to His Apostles: "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him"; as if to say: "The traitor has gone forth to complete his plans, and beholding My suffering and death, I see in them both the beginning of triumph and victory. When I shall be lifted up above the earth, I shall draw all things to Myself." In the same tone He continues: "If God be glorified in Him, so also shall God glorify Him. A little while and I am with you; you shall seek Me, but where I go you may not come. A new commandment I give unto you: to love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples if you love one another."

Peter, passing over the last words of Our Blessed Lord, could think only of those other words in which Christ foreshadowed His departure from them, and he cried out: "Lord, whither goest Thou?" And Christ answered him: "Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow hereafter." Peter, in the ardor

of his love for his great Master, still insists: "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thee." And the Master answered: "Wilt thou lay down thy life for Me? Amen, Amen, I say to thee, the cock shall not crow till thou deny Me thrice."

Here is the first, and, alas! presumptuous protest of fidelity made by Peter to His Master. It is clear from the text of both St. Luke and St. John that it happened in the Cenacle. Later on we shall see how Peter, learning nothing from his former presumption, began to protest his fidelity. And this time, as if to comfort the future Head of His Church, Christ calls him sweetly by his familiar name and says to him: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has sought thee to sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith may not fail, and thou being converted shalt strengthen the faith of thy brethren."

Well might Peter feel grateful to the Master for such great goodness and for this precious assurance of final fidelity which He gave him. But Peter was moved at the moment only by the impulses of his generous heart, and was heedless of the prophecy of his fall. He counted only upon his own strength and good-will; he repeated that he was ready to go with his Master to prison and to death. Christ answered again: "Before the cock crow thou shalt deny Me thrice."

Surely such words from the Divine Master produced profound consternation in the minds and the hearts of His little faithful flock. They knew their own good-will and their love for Him, but still it was the Master Who

spoke these words, it was the Great Prophet, the Son of God, Who made this prediction of Peter's fall, and a feeling of terror invaded all their hearts.

Christ saw the depression depicted upon their countenances and again began to stimulate their courage: "Let not your heart be troubled," He said, "have faith in God and have faith in Me." He then spoke to them in a series of wonderful discourses which reveal His prophetic outlook upon the future of the Church, His promises to His Apostles, His threats to the selfish world, and His appeals to the mercy of His Father. The Apostles hung upon His lips as He spoke these wonderful words, and they whispered to each other what even His enemies have been compelled to say: "Never did man speak like this Man," and the faith and the love of the Apostles towards Christ grew deeper and stronger than ever. At a certain point the Master returned again to the thought of His departure from them (John XIV, 27 *seq.*): "Let not your heart be troubled. You have heard what I have said to you. I go and I return to you. If you love Me, you must rejoice that I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." (Here He speaks as Son of Man to God the Father.) "And now I have told you before it happens so that when it does happen you will believe. I shall not speak much more to you because already the prince of this world cometh. In reality he can do nothing against Me, but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father hath commanded Me, so I do. Arise, let us go." This was the sign to depart from the Cenacle.

The prince of this world of whom Our Blessed Lord here speaks is the Devil and all those who are of the Devil. Indeed, Satan could do nothing against the Lord Who was innocence itself. But as Christ had come on earth to expiate the sins of men and to satisfy the Divine Justice, so He arose and went willingly to meet death, thus fulfilling the will of His Father, which was His will also. Only a few days before He had solemnly proclaimed in the temple: "No one can take My life, but I have the power to lay it down and the power to take it up again."

After rising from the table and preparing to go out from the Cenacle, as St. Luke narrates, this interesting incident occurred: Turning to the disciples, "He said to them: 'When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, did you want anything?' But they said: 'Nothing.' Then said He unto them: 'But now he that hath a purse, let him take it and likewise a scrip; and he that hath not, let him sell his coat and buy a sword, for I say to you that this that is written must yet be fulfilled in Me, and with the wicked was he reckoned,' for the things concerning Me have an end!" The Apostles, still obtuse of mind, took these words in their material sense and said: "Lord, behold, here are two swords"; and at once Peter and Simon Zelotes took sword in hand.

The precaution did not seem useless at this time of the Passover, since an enormous multitude usually came up to Jerusalem, and among them naturally there would be some doubtful characters. Besides this, they had to traverse through country paths to arrive at Olivet. Christ understood their hearts and said simply to them:

"It is enough," and, accompanied by the eleven, He went out of the Cenacle towards Gethsemane.

On the Way to Gethsemane

Gethsemane was the place where the Master usually stayed at night if He delayed in Jerusalem and did not wish to go to the hospitable home of His friend Lazarus. Some say that Gethsemane was a public garden, others that it was the property of Lazarus or of Nicodemus or of some other of the disciples of the Master, and that, therefore, He could always find safe refuge there. It is certain that Christ was accustomed to go there at night if detained in the Holy City, and this He did on the first evening of the Passion.

The route which He followed coming from the Cenacle is perfectly clear. A short distance from the Cenacle, from the summit of Sion, a long series of steps descended to the valley which is in the midst of Jerusalem, and from there by a rapid descent other stairs led to the gate of the city and to the famous pool of Siloe. Thence they came out onto the plain towards the south of the city.

To reach Gethsemane from this plain it was necessary to walk up the vale of Josaphat bordering the brook Cedron; without doubt it was the way followed by Our Lord on this sad night. The Apostles, filled with faith and love by the discourses of the Master and by the Holy Sacrament received from Him, walked with Him along the way. Being still of rude intellect and simple understanding, they naturally could not yet fully understand

the whole meaning of Christ's words and all that He had done and said in the Cenacle.

What He had prefigured and predicted as about to happen was not all clear to them. How could they persuade themselves that this their Master, the long desired Messias, could perish miserably! It was all so repugnant to what they had ever known, or learned, or understood of the promised Messias, Who was to establish a new order of things in the world and Who was to restore the Kingdom of Israel, and extend it over all the world.

So they understood little of all that Christ had told them about His Passion and His Death soon to take place.

Still less did they understand the word "resurrection." As St. Luke says, this word was to them a mystery. Meanwhile, the Master on His way to Gethsemane, walking slowly at times, at times stopping with the Apostles gathered around Him, continued His instructions to them. "I am the true vine," He said, "and My Father is the husbandman. Be united with Me and I shall be with you. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains united to the vine, so you also unless you remain in Me." And He went on to explain more fully the meaning of these words, so apt under the circumstances, so necessary to the Apostles just then.

Again He returns to His great precept: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. You are My friends if you obey My commandment. I command you that you love one another." It seems as if He would never tire of repeating the same words and

the same sentiment in order to impress profoundly upon their souls in that hour, as His last testament, the spirit of love which ought to animate His disciples. How little the world still seems to understand this chief and most important command of Christ!

Again He returns to the thought of His departure from them: "A little while and you shall see Me and again a little while and you shall not see Me," and He goes on to comfort them with the assurance that He only leaves them to go to His Father that He might prepare for them a place, and that He would come again to take them with Him. He promises not to leave them orphans, but that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, will come to them, sent by the Father in Christ's own name.

He predicts the persecutions that will come to them and to all His disciples from the world, which would always hate them as it hated Him. But He encourages them with the thought that He will be with them always, and that the Father Himself will strengthen them by His love. "Behold," He says, "I speak to you no more in parables. I came from the Father to the world. Again I leave the world and return to the Father."

The Apostles, struck by the clearness and precision of this language, exclaimed: "Behold, now Thou speakest clearly to us and not in parables. Now we know that Thou knowest all things and there is no need for anyone to ask Thee. By this we believe that Thou art come from God."

And here happens an episode indicated by St. John and narrated more at length by St. Matthew and St. Mark.

At the exclamation of the Apostles: "By this we believe that Thou art come from God," the Master answered: "Do you believe now? Behold the hour cometh, indeed it is now here, in which you shall be scattered, everyone going his own way and you will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not all alone for the Father is with Me." And He goes on to say: "All of you shall be scandalized in Me this night because it is written: 'I shall strike the shepherd and the flock shall be dispersed'"; and then He adds: "But after I shall be risen again, I shall go before you into Galilee."

Again Peter, in his impetuous confidence, exclaims: "Though all shall be scandalized in Thee, Lord, I shall never be scandalized." And Jesus answered: "In truth I say to thee that in this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice."

St. Mark, narrating this same incident with more precision, writes: "Amen, I say to thee that to-day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

There is no contradiction here in this detail between the Evangelists. The cock crows for the first time about midnight and again at about three in the morning. St. Matthew and St. Luke occupy themselves little with the details of this incident, it would seem; but St. Mark, who was the companion of St. Peter, goes more minutely into the circumstances which he had heard from the Apostle himself and notes the different times of the cock's crow with perfect exactness. Ah! others might forget the sad incident with all its details, but Peter, never; never while

life lasted was that sad moment out of his memory. Nothing could cure the impetuosity of Peter, it would seem, and to the prediction of the Master again he answered: "Even though it be necessary to die with Thee, I shall not deny Thee."

This strong affirmation of their faith all the others repeated after Peter, and they gathered around the Divine Master anxious to show Him their love for Him. And He, though with the eye of His divine knowledge He foresaw already how they would flee from Him in fear, nevertheless now comforts them: "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have distress, but have confidence. I have overcome the world."

They had already traversed nearly all of the way and were approaching the bridge of the brook which led them almost immediately to Gethsemane. The moon, almost full, was already risen above Mount Olivet and sent its pallid rays over the valley, lighting up the hills about and shining brightly above Mount Moria. Above on the opposite hill, crowned with the walls of the Holy City, arose the great temple, "the House of My Father," as Christ frequently called it, where He had wrought so many prodigies, where He had talked so sublimely of the things of God.

In that hour of sorrow, lifting up His eyes to Him, facing the Holy City and the temple, He uttered this wonderful prayer: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may glorify Thee! Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He may give eternal life to all

whom Thou hast given Him. Now this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. I have glorified Thee upon earth, I have finished the work Thou hast given Me to do, and now glorify Me before Thee, O Father, with that glory which I had before the world was with Thee."

And turning His thoughts from His Eternal Father to those who stood around Him, He continued: "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me; because they are Thine. . . . Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one as We are one. While I was with them, I kept them in Thy Name . . . and none of them is lost but the son of perdition that the Scripture may be fulfilled. . . . I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from evil. They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world. Sanctify them in truth. And not alone for them do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me, that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee. . . . Father, I will that where I am they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me; that they may see My glory which Thou hast given Me, because Thou hast loved Me before the creation of the world. Just Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee; and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have made known Thy Name to them, and will make it known, that the Love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

He was silent awhile and none of the Apostles dared to

speak a word. The brook Cedron flowing on between the rocks at the bottom of the valley seemed to echo the voice of the Lord. A veil of sadness descended upon the souls of all of them.

Soon they passed the bridge and they were at the entrance to Gethsemane. Here the Divine Master halted His footsteps for a moment, and gazed over the valley up the hill where the Holy City and the great temple stood. The ruin of both He had predicted only two days before. Surely, it was a wonderful spectacle. The walls of Solomon, restored by Herod, lifted themselves proudly round about Moria. The great eastern gate with its ornaments of chiseled bronze faced towards the grand entrance to the porticoes of Herod and Solomon, in the midst of which arose the Sanctum and the Sanctum Sanctorum.

The silver beams of the moon lighted up the spires of the pinnacle, showing forth the battlements of the galleries in their brilliant marble, clothing them with soft light descending from a sky of turquoise, dotted with a million stars. In the quiet of that spring night, the Divine Majesty seemed still to be all clemency and tenderness towards the throne erected to Him by His chosen people. Alas! it was the very last caress of the mercy which God offered to the unhappy city.

CHAPTER IV

IN GETHSEMANE

GETHSEMANE, situated on the side of Mount Olivet, was called the Garden of Olives because of the ancient olive trees which covered the slope of the mountain. In the midst of this olive grove was a shelter for the oil press, where the weary traveler might find a modest resting place. To-day there remains no trace of this shelter. There is instead, still intact, a large grotto, or cavern, deep in the mountain side. That, too, offered itself as a shelter from the cold of the night.

Computing the time of leaving the Cenacle as about seven o'clock in the evening, it would be about nine o'clock at night that Christ reached Gethsemane.

At the entrance to the Garden, the Master, again breaking the long silence, said to His Apostles: "Sit you here till I go yonder and pray."

Not wishing, however, to go entirely alone, He took with Him three of His Apostles, Peter, James, and John. It was they who had seen the glory of the Son of Man and the splendors of the Transfiguration on Thabor. It was to them that in the midst of all of the joy of that day He had indicated the end which would take place in Jerusalem. They at least should not now be scandalized, should not be disturbed in the midst of these sorrowful conditions; and these He chose now to be the witnesses of His terrible sufferings on that fatal night.

Advancing slowly into the heart of the grove with His three companions, He began to tremble and a profound sadness and an awful fatigue seized His soul. "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," He moaned with trembling lips. Overwhelmed with suffering, He sought a solitude still greater, and He said to His three Apostles: "Stay here and watch." Then, as St. Luke narrates, He left them and walked away a stone's throw.

The Prayer

He felt the profound necessity of being entirely alone, alone with His Father, to reveal to Him freely the fullness of His soul and to breathe the prayer of our redemption. Prostrate, with His face to the earth, He groaned and said: "My father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done. Father! Father! everything is possible with Thee. Take away this chalice from Me. Yet not as I will, but as Thou willest."

How deep the mystery in this suffering of Our Lord! Had He not said once, "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straightened until it be accomplished?" Had He not just proclaimed in the Cenacle, "With a great desire, have I desired to eat this Pasch with you." Did He not, therefore, in union with His Father's will, desire the fulfilling of His terrible Passion? Surely He did. Why, therefore, this awful grief, this profound sorrow which makes Him exclaim that His soul is sorrowful even unto death?

The Son of God, taking upon Himself the nature of

Man, became similar to us in all things, sin excepted. And so as man He suffered hunger and thirst. He felt fatigue and weariness. He exulted at the resurrection of Lazarus and wept over Jerusalem. So now, in the shadow of His great Passion, there arose within Him the terror which reigns in every human heart at the sight of sacrifice. And then, too, He must have thought: "What good will all this suffering do? What will all My pain and anguish avail?"

By the light of that divinity which illumined the soul of the Redeemer, He saw not only the terrors of the Passion just before Him, but He also saw its consequences throughout all succeeding ages. In that supreme hour, so the Fathers and all the mystics agree, passed as if in a picture all the scenes of His Sacred Passion.

He saw the horrible torture which He must soon undergo. He saw the treachery of Judas, the desertion of the Apostles, the yelling of the crowd before the judgment seat, the flagellation, the crowning with thorns, the crucifixion, and the bitter jests flung at Him while hanging on the Cross. Before His soul, divinely enlightened, Jesus reviewed the whole story of human events till the end of the world. He saw the heroism of the martyrs, the virtue of the saints, and the immense love for Him of an innumerable multitude of Christians. This sight consoled His breaking heart. But He saw, too, the vices, the sins, the abominations of the whole perverse world, the heresies and the schisms which would rend His Holy Church and profane the sanctuary.

He saw the sufferings of many souls dear to Him, caused by the injustice of others. He saw, too, alas! — and this

was the culmination of His grief — the uselessness of all His sufferings for a great multitude of the wicked, to whom His divine Passion would be only an added argument for greater irritation and anger, as Simeon had prophesied: "This Child is set for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be contradicted." At the sight of all this His heart was crushed within Him.

But His grief and terror certainly did not mean His refusal to face His terrible Passion and to undergo it all, since often He had told of the necessity of His sacrifice and His willingness to accept it. So, though terrified at the awful vision spread before Him and weak unto death with sadness at the sight of it, still He went to meet it all with firm and resolute will; just as the patient may abhor the disgusting taste of the medicine, but He takes it because it is helpful, as St. Thomas so aptly says.

But it was not only the vision of the suffering immediately confronting Him and of the future trials of His Church and His faithful followers which weighed down the heart of Christ in deep anguish; nor was it alone the desolating picture of all the ingratitude of humanity and the uselessness of His Passion for many that grieved Him so sorely. There was still another motive even more exalted and more noble.

He was torn with grief at the sight of our sins and He begged God, His Eternal Father, to pardon them. He bore upon His own shoulders the sins of the whole world. "He assumed our sins and He suffered for them," writes St. Ambrose. "He suffered for the sins of all," St. Thomas

writes. "Not only that, the grief and the sorrow of Christ for sins surpassed the contrition of all sinners" (continues St. Thomas) "because our Lord, more than anyone else, understood the iniquity of sin; and because upon His soul was laid the whole weight of all the sorrow and remorse of every sinner in the whole world."

History tells us the story of many a sinner who, face to face with the horror of his own faults and lapses, touched by a ray of divine grace, became utterly inconsolable, wept torrents of tears, fainted, and some even died of grief at the feet of their confessor.

Imagine, then, the torture which seized upon the soul of Christ as He gazed with the saddest of eyes upon all the innumerable and indescribable burdens of human iniquity which now were heaped upon Him, an innocent victim of their malice. No wonder He cried aloud with a breaking heart: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," and, His human strength being unable further to bear the awful burden, He fell upon the ground prone in fearful agony and the blood rushed out from every pore of His body. Here we must note the words of St. Ambrose: "He is sorrowful, not He Himself, not the divine substance, but the soul of Christ; for divinity suffers not, but the humanity of Christ suffered the most exquisite torments."

Here we must consider the sublime efficacy of the works and deeds of Christ for the redemption of humanity. The rebellion and the offense of a miserable creature of earth in its moral effects reach the infinite, and therefore such offense can never be adequately atoned for except by a grief and sorrow of infinite value and by a penitence of in-

finite worth. Hence, man alone, of himself, as a finite being, is incapable of satisfying the Divine Justice, no matter how great his grief or how deep his penitence.

But behold! the Son of God comes down from Heaven, takes up our human nature, a human soul and a human body, and, as Man, offers to His Divine Father His prayers and supplications for us, and undergoes for us His own terrible Passion and Death. Because His prayers and His sufferings are of infinite value, He being God as well as Man, they supply what no merit of ours alone could ever give. As in the case of a man composed of body and soul who suffers or is wounded in any single member, he suffers and is wounded as a man, so Christ, a person Human-Divine, suffering in His humanity, suffers as Christ, that is, as the Man-God; and His acts, precisely because they are those of a Man-God, have an infinite value.

Oh, wonderful Providence of God which thus conciliates the perfect satisfaction of Divine Justice with pity and mercy towards man! "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how incomprehensible are His judgments, how unsearchable His ways!" (St. Paul to the Romans, XI, 33.) Oh, what should be our gratitude towards Our Heavenly Father Who for us gave His Only Begotten Son! And how can we ever show our sentiments of deep thankfulness to Christ, Who by His prayers and tears and the awful sufferings of His Sacred Passion has saved us from the consequences of the sin of Adam and the results of our own sins?

For an hour thus Jesus remained in prayer. Trembling and weak, at last He arose and made His way tottering to-

wards the three Apostles whom He had left a short distance away. Perhaps He thought to find in their company some slight respite from the terror which had overwhelmed His soul, as one seeks his friends when his soul is overwhelmed with grief. And then, too, as the Faithful Shepherd, He was still anxious about the welfare of His little flock.

He found them sleeping. They, too, had been overwhelmed with grief, as St. Luke clearly indicates. Sweetly He complains to them, saying to Peter: "Simon, dost thou sleep? Couldst thou not watch one hour with Me? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

Surely, this was no light fault on the part of the three chosen Apostles. They had begun well, praying together with sorrowful souls, but soon, in the absence of the Master, their forces began to fail them and nature conquered. Christ knew all this and, as if to excuse them and comfort them, said: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

And here the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church admonish that the omission of prayer in time of great anxiety weakened in the Apostles that special grace which alone could keep them strong, and thus they were exposed to the weakness of the flesh and of nature.

Once more the Master, with labored steps, slowly, bowed in weakness, sought solitude in prayer. The Apostles watched Him with anxious eyes, terrified beyond words at the sight of His unspeakable grief and weakness. An awful sorrow seized upon their souls and they, too, began to pray in silence.

Upon His knees, with His eyes lifted towards Heaven, the Divine Master raised again His trembling voice: "Father, if it is not possible that this chalice should pass unless I drink it, Thy will be done." The prayer is the same in general as the one He had offered a short time before, only now one sees more clearly the complete resignation of Christ to the sacrifice.

Again, after some time, He returned to the three Apostles, but again He found them overwhelmed with weakness and dead asleep. Feeling His presence near them, they awoke in terror and bounded to their feet. And St. Mark says that in their confusion they knew not what to answer Him. Again, they had failed in fidelity; they had slept while He was suffering His terrible agony.

For the third time Jesus retired to the solitude of prayer and again besought God to hear Him. And here St. Luke narrates an incident of striking importance. In the midst of His agony there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven to comfort Him, and as the agony of His soul increased He prayed even more fervently and His sweat became like drops of blood, which rained down over His body to the earth.

History narrates the example of various people who, at the time of unspeakable anguish, have sweated blood. The description, therefore, of St. Luke helps us the better to realize the force of the words of Christ: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." Here let us remark, in passing, that though this particular description of St. Luke is omitted in some of the Greek and Latin codices, St. Epiphanius explains the omission by stating that the copyists of

the time, fearing that the Arians would use that text to sustain their heresy against the Divinity of Jesus Christ, left these words out. But the codices which the Church has always retained as authentic and complete give the words of St. Luke as narrated. In fact all the ancient Fathers, St. Justin, St. John Chrysostom, St. Hilary, St. Epiphanius and others, comment upon it expressly as indicating the intensity of the love of Christ for sinners.

Let us stop for a moment to consider these words of St. Luke. As the angels of Heaven had chanted the Gloria in Excelsis above the crib of the newborn Messias; as they had appeared to Him in the desert after His long fast and the temptation of Satan (St. Matthew IV, 11): so now an angel of the Lord appears to Jesus, adoring Him and offering to Him in His suffering heavenly words of consolation. On that awful night, when He was about to be betrayed, while the pontiffs and princes of His people were preparing for Him an ignominious and cruel death, when abandoned by all, even by His three most faithful disciples, His heavenly Father sends Him one of His angels to stay by Him and comfort Him in His hour of unspeakable sorrow.

What may have been the consoling words which this angel of God addressed to his suffering Lord? Did he, perchance, reveal to Him the dread necessity of His awful sacrifice, the incalculable good which would result from it for all eternity? Did he tell Him of the infinite glory it would give forevermore to His Divine Father, or unveil to Him how millions upon millions of men, filled with an immense love for Him, would exalt His Name above every

other name until time should be no more, and that generation after generation of His faithful followers would bend the knee at the mention of His Holy Name, and that all in Heaven, on earth and in Hell would henceforth acknowledge Him as the Saviour?

The Evangelists say nothing of this, but surely Christ by the apparition and with the consolation of the angel of God gathered strength to face the bitter end. Yet the Evangelist narrates that, after the apparition of the angel, Jesus entered into His agony and sweated blood. What human soul can solve these sublime mysteries entirely? But many of those who have meditated upon the Passion of Christ believe that, while Our Blessed Lord was strengthened and consoled in His full acceptance of the chalice offered Him to drink, the struggle between His will and the mere human inclinations of His human nature and the senses was so great that it caused the same phenomena as one sees in the death agony.

The terror which Christ felt affected the heart with such a violent constriction that a cold sweat diffused itself all over His body, and this cold sweat, by the reaction and impulse of the heart, became little by little tinged with blood which bathed His forehead and the members of His body so copiously that it dropped upon the earth where He knelt. Oh, ineffable mystery of the sorrow and the love of Jesus Christ!

Many Fathers and theologians hold that at this awful time of Christ's suffering this bloody sweat was caused by the struggle of the soul of Christ with eternal justice; that He, the new Adam, prayed that the sentence of

death upon the old Adam, who had brought sin upon the world, might be abrogated.

Indeed, agony, in its original Greek sense, means struggle, and especially the supreme struggle which man makes at the hour of death. St. Ambrose, speaking of the agony of Christ, says: "He struggled for me that He might conquer for me."

Some writers see in the agony of Christ something of a similar instance in the case of Jacob struggling with the angel and not letting him go until he had blessed him. St. Isadore writes: "In His Passion Christ, in the weakness of His human nature, seems to overcome God." And this also is the thought of St. Paul when he writes: "Who in the days of His flesh, with a strong cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save Him from death, was heard for His reverence." (Hebrews v, 7.)

We see, therefore, how this fearful agony of Christ was a supreme struggle of grief and love on the part of Our Blessed Lord, so violent and so terrible that it made Him sweat even blood for our salvation. O Divine Redeemer, how can we ever thank Thee for all Thy wonderful mercy and goodness, for Thy tears and Thy prayers, and the dread agony of Thy suffering for us and for our salvation!

One may ask; Who was this consoling angel sent by the Divine Father to His suffering Son? It is generally believed to be the Archangel Gabriel, whom we have known as the privileged messenger of Heaven in the work of redemption. He it was who was sent to Daniel to indicate

to him, five centuries before, the precise epoch of this great event. He it was who predicted to Zachary the birth of the Precursor, and it was he also, who announced to Mary, Most Holy, the great Annunciation. It is reasonable to believe that now again he comes down to earth with a message of consolation and fortitude from the Eternal Father to the God-Man in agony.

Consoled and strengthened by the words of the angel, and feeling assured now that He had been heard by His Divine Father, the Master arose and for the third time returned to the three disciples, whom for the third time He found in deep slumber. "Sleep ye now," He says, "and take your rest. It is enough: the hour is come: Behold the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go. Behold! he that will betray Me is at hand." And in truth already, through the shadow of the trees, near the bridge above the brook Cedron, may be seen advancing slowly and cautiously, looking slyly hither and thither as they advanced, a large group of men.

The Capture

The Apostles, alas! had allowed themselves to be overcome by sleep, but Judas and the Pharisees and the other enemies of Our Lord yielded to no such weakness and lost no time. How often one sees the same sad truth verified! The iniquitous sow their wicked seed and labor day and night, while the good sleep. Three or four hours after he left the Cenacle, Judas went to gather a large body of armed men (turba multa). This crowd was armed with

swords and clubs and was provided with lanterns and axes.

Judas had obtained from the priests the order for some of their ministers to accompany him. Was it for aid or defense? Very likely for both. Impelled by passion and by Satan, who had entered into him, he gave, with a sickening cynicism, instructions to his men so that they might make no mistake in the capture. That they might recognize the Nazarene, he fixed upon a signal, the kiss of friendship: "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is He." And he added: "Lay hold on Him and lead Him away carefully."

The Master with His three Apostles, meanwhile, approached the other eight, and all together they walked sadly and slowly towards the gate of the garden. There, unexpectedly, they encountered the traitor, who approached with furtive steps. Judas had hoped to surprise the Master in His prayers or in sleep, and in giving Him the kiss, which was the mark understood by the guards, he hoped to deliver Him to them without being discovered by the Master and His disciples.

How little he understood the clearness of vision of Christ! Judas had hoped to cover himself by his deceit, but Christ openly reveals the infamy of the traitor by going out to meet him, surrounded by His eleven disciples. And facing Judas, with a ringing voice He asks him: "Friend, why comest thou here?" Friend! The loving and tender title with which He was accustomed to salute His disciples.

But alas! though taken by surprise, the sweet word of Christ touched him not at all. Nevertheless, overcome

by confusion, he stammers into a mocking salutation: "Rabbi, Rabbi, Ave!" "Master, Master, Hail!" At once he kissed Jesus. Christ, turning, said to him: "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

In these words Christ made it clear to Judas and to all that He understood well the sign of the traitor. Did this revelation open the eyes of Judas and soften his heart? Did not the ineffable sweetness of these words of the Divine Master arouse in the heart of the traitor at least some slight sentiment of remorse? What went on in the soul of Judas we know not, for of that the Scripture is silent. But certainly, more even than the look of love which later He gave to Peter, more than the sweet words of pardon that He addressed to the Magdalen, more than the promise of Paradise to the good thief upon the cross, this calm and sweet and merciful salutation of the Redeemer to the traitor, intent only on delivering Him to His enemies, moves us ineffably at the thought of the divine magnanimity which filled to overflowing Christ's Sacred Heart.

Oh, the goodness and the mercy of Christ! What a lesson in charity and patience for us! How it opens our hearts with hope eternal! Ah, yes if only, when Christ speaks, we do not resist His voice; if only, when Christ looks upon us, we do not close our eyes to the light of His truth; if only, when He reminds us of our sins, we do humble penance for them; if, in a word, we follow the example of Peter, not of Judas!

The Apostles, filled with indignation at the sight of this

treachery on the part of their former colleague, gathered close about Jesus with threatening countenances, but Christ, in the midst of all this commotion, moved tranquilly to meet the crowd of armed men who, seeing Him suddenly before them, for a moment stood still in their places.

"Whom seek ye?" He said to them with an even voice. They answered: "Jesus of Nazareth." And Christ said: "I am He." At this solemn declaration the crowd before Him staggered back and fell upon the ground, even as the cedars of Lebanon fall before a violent tempest, or as the desert sands are whirled before a strong wind. The light of their lanterns was extinguished and Christ stood before them illumined by the splendor of the silvery moon, and He seemed at that moment a glorious victor triumphing over His enemies.

The crowd, stunned and amazed, stumbled to their feet again, and then Jesus repeated the question: "Whom seek ye?" And voices from out the crowd replied: "Jesus of Nazareth"; to which Christ answered: "I have already told you that I am He. Since you seek Me, let these go," pointing to the eleven who stood about Him in wondering fear and amazement. This the Master said in a voice of command, and the guards, taking it as such, allowed the Apostles to withdraw. But before going, realizing the situation suddenly, some of the Apostles said to the Master: "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" Peter impulsively drew forth the sword which he had carried with him from the Cenacle, and struck with it the first one who came towards him. He was a servant of the

High Priest named Malchus and with the blow Peter cut off his right ear.

This impetuous act on the part of the Prince of the Apostles served only to increase the confusion and disorder of the scene. Christ, always calm, turning to His disciples said: "Let it be. It is enough." And, turning to Peter, He said to him: "Put up thy sword into the scabbard, for he who draweth the sword shall perish by the sword. What think you? Can I not ask My Father and He would give Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scripture be fulfilled that so it must be done? And must I not drink the chalice which My Father has given Me to drink?" And, going up close to Malchus, He touched his ear and healed it.

Let us consider a moment this series of wonderful events. "It is I," said Jesus, "Ego Sum," and at the words His enemies fall to earth. Long since, this same potent word was pronounced on Horeb and on Sinai. It was the voice of God announcing to the people of Israel, in the midst of thunder and lightning, His great commandments, "I am Who am. I am the Lord, thy God." And once again, for the third time, that same voice will proclaim the presence of God, and that time it will be in this same valley of Josaphat where Christ met Judas. It will be the voice of the Son of God sitting in judgment before all the generations of the earth; and again that same declaration of His Divinity will fill the earth and the children of the earth with mortal terror.

This is the thought of St. Augustine when he says: "What will be the power of the voice of the Son of God

when He comes in glory, if here in the face of death it was so terrible and potent?" And St. Ambrose, continuing in the line of these same reflections, says: "Behold how at the very sound of His voice this great crowd of His enemies, fierce in anger and terrible in arms, at one word from Christ fell prostrate to the earth!"

To the consideration of this wonderful event we must add several others, all of which are manifestations of Christ's Divinity, even in the moment of His greatest dejection. Note well the revelation of the secret sign by which Judas was to betray his Master, the kiss of friendship; and further, too, behold the miraculous healing of Malchus. These things Judas and the crowd with him saw clearly with their own eyes, but all in vain. At that moment they were blind with passion or weak with fear or insane with malice and wickedness. Later, as the Apostles recalled these events, some of these people opened their eyes to the true light, but at that moment eyes and minds were closed to the divine reality before them. They were determined to work out their evil plan, and God, permitting that, still made them serve His eternal designs.

The Divine Master, still standing meekly before them, reproved them for the boisterous and angry manner with which they had come out to take Him. "You have come here," He said, "with swords and clubs to arrest Me as if I were a thief. Every day I was with you in the temple sitting among you and teaching you, yet you stretched not out your arms against Me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness, that the Scripture may be fulfilled."

By these words, clearly, He gave them permission to seize Him. Then only did they throw themselves upon Jesus. Without any legal formality they bound Him forcibly as if He were a dangerous criminal.

Where now are the Apostles? Where now is Peter, who had sworn to accompany Him even unto death? All had abandoned Him; all, seized with terror, fled from Him. Not one of them was arrested, not even Peter, who had done enough to be indicted. No, they were allowed to go their way, for Christ had said to the mob: "If you seek Me, let these go," and thus the prayer of Christ to His Father was fulfilled: "Of those Whom Thou hast given Me I have lost no one." Even now began to be verified the pathetic words of the Redeemer. True, He was even now in the midst of humiliations and sufferings which would end only by His death, even by the death of the Cross; but in the very midst of all this contempt and ignominy the Divinity of the Victim shone forth, and His Name, even now, was above every other name.

CHAPTER V

ON MOUNT SION

The Progress towards the House of the High Priest

St. Ambrose bids us remember that, when we read that Jesus was taken, we must beware of thinking that He was taken unwillingly or on account of any weakness of His own. "Ille enim quando voluit detentus est, quando voluit occisus est." — "When He wished He was bound, when He wished, He was delivered unto death," says St. Augustine. "Oblatus est quia ipse voluit." — "He was offered because He wished it," is the prophetic utterance of Isaias. The ministers of the Sanhedrim and the armed mob who came out against Him had really no power over Him but that which He Himself permitted.

This is evident from the first moment when, at the mere declaration of His presence before them, they fell senseless to the earth. But once having shown forth His divine power, as the glory of God and the prestige of His mission as Redeemer demanded, He allowed free rein to the laws of nature and the will of man, unjust as it was. So as a child, when the fury of Herod sought to put to death the newborn King of the Jews, He stopped not the hand of the impious tyrant, neither did He perform extraordinary prodigies, but He withdrew by His flight with Mary, His mother, and Joseph, from the infamous persecution of the king.

We must often remember this when face to face with the evils that confront us. With short-sighted vision we expect Divine Justice immediately to intervene and destroy the plans of the impious who plot against us. Divine Justice, we may well be assured, will intervene, but in its own good time and when the infinite wisdom of God deems it opportune for His greater glory and for the order and well-being of humanity. Christ, therefore, we repeat, went to meet death because He wished so to do. The Son of God, made man to become a new Adam for our redemption, by the very fact that He offers Himself willingly for our salvation, acquires still greater title to our gratitude and attachment to Him, just as a good father, by the voluntary character of his labors and privations, merits all the more the love and devotion of his children.

In the most barbarous manner the mob bound Jesus with cords and chains. Judas, you remember, had advised them to take Him away with caution. Evidently they feared some surprise and they wished to make sure of their prey. Doubtless the ministers of the Sanhedrim, who had accompanied Judas and the crowd, directed all these cruel maneuvers. With a word He had terrified them all, so this time they would make sure that He could not escape them.

"At last!" they cried out, "we have You in our hands and we will make sure that You shall not escape us. Now that we have You bound, what force have You to resist us? Free Yourself now if You can. You thought to frighten us with a word. Now where are Your wonderful arts and conceits?" Had they not remembered that Samson one

day had pulled down the very pillars of the house about him? Even so might Christ have broken through all their cords and chains as if they were a mere cobweb, but Jesus had said: "This is your hour and the power of darkness."

They began now to form themselves roughly in ranks, and, placing the Master like a prisoner in the midst of them, they marched rapidly to conduct Him before the high priests, dragging Him and pushing Him cruelly as in their hurry they ran along the road. Crossing the brook Cedron, they began to descend the valley. At a point along the road a youth, clothed in a white garment, began to follow them. Struck with the thought that he, perhaps, was one of the messengers of the Nazarene, they turned to seize him, but he fled from them, leaving in their hands the white cloth which had covered him.

Who, we may ask, was this? There are some who think that it was the Evangelist, St. Mark, who narrates the fact. Others think it was the Apostle John, or James the Less, but one may well doubt whether any of the Apostles, who already had abandoned Him, would risk following Him so close at hand. It is true that two of the Apostles did follow the Lord, but, as the Evangelist said, from afar. It may be that the noisy procession aroused the youth from his sleep, and that, driven by curiosity, he rushed out of the house to see what was going on. We know nothing more certain about him.

Halfway up the valley a street led up the hill towards the gate of the city, which opened upon the quarter called Ophel. This was the shortest way to the house of

the high priests on Sion. It would be only natural that in their haste they would take the nearest way, and such, indeed, is the opinion of most commentators. Ophel was the part of the city inhabited by the poorer class, who had always been fervent followers and friends of the Nazarene, among whom He had done many miracles. The crowd feared that in passing through this part of the city the friends of Christ would rise up and attempt to free Him. The Sanhedrim, in fact, had taken every precaution against this, and the public square and the streets were filled with soldiers. In fact the presence of the soldiery and the noisy rumors of the crowd which had captured the Master aroused these poor friends of Christ from their beds, and they ran to the windows and poured out into the streets to see what had happened.

When they saw the beloved Master bound in the midst of the guards, His countenance pale as death, His clothing in disorder, bound by ropes with which the guards pulled Him along, they raised a cry of indignation and protest, and many, at the sight of One Who had been such a dear friend to the people, bowed their heads and wept bitterly. Others, alas! weak souls as there always are even among friends, were scandalized at the sight of Christ in the hour of His abandonment; and though they before had believed in Him on account of the miracles He had wrought among them, now they allowed doubt and diffidence to enter their hearts. This then, as now, is always the first step towards yielding the great cause of the Lord.

Passing through the quarter Ophel, the mob then descended into the valley and from there began the ascent

to Sion. The path led them through gardens and groves lying along the side of the hill and finally reached the top, at the house of the high priests.

Annas, Caiphas — The Sanhedrim

It will not be without interest to know something of the character of the high priests and the Council of the Sanhedrim.

Annas, the son of Seth, appears to have been elected legally to the office of High Priest. After the expulsion of Archelaus, the son of Herod the First, Rome assumed directly the government of the Province of Judea under the rule of a procurator. At the end of nine years Annas was deposed, though the office of High Priest was for life. Rome had decided against him, and Rome's decision must be obeyed.

Annas, however, in the eyes of the Israelites, retained all the prestige of his election to the high priesthood. He had various successors, each of whom served but a short term until Caiphas came into the office, who, according to Josephus Flavius, had purchased his position at a great price. At the time when Christ was brought before his tribunal, he had occupied the position of High Priest already sixteen years.

Caiphas was a weak man, entirely in the hands of his father-in-law, Annas, who, though old, was extremely clever, astute and rich. He was the practical head of the sacerdotal party. In fact, whenever the two names were mentioned together, Annas took precedence. This St. Luke marks when he says: "Under the high priests,

Annas and Caiphas." (St. Luke III, 2.) Annas, therefore, was the leading figure in the conspiracy hatched against the Master, and upon him chiefly rests the crime of deicide.

Josephus Flavius gives us a clear description of the iniquitous character of Annas, Caiphas, and the whole family. The Talmud, the legal text of the Hebrew nation, thus speaks of the High Priest: "What a wrath of God is this family of Simon Bœtius! May their tongues be forever accursed! What dread misfortune is the family of Annas! Accursed be the hisses of these vipers!" These were the men who, in the time of Our Blessed Lord, were the supreme heads of the Jewish religion.

Great as was the authority of the high priests, it was not, however, absolute. The final decision rested with the Sanhedrim, the Great Council of the nation, which from the time of the Machabees had controlled the more important affairs, both religious and political. It is true that the Romans had abbreviated much of their authority. Especially had they taken away from them the power of life and death. Nevertheless, the power of the Sanhedrim was very great, as is evident from the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of the Evangelists and from the works of the historian, Josephus Flavius. The arrest and indictment of the Master also prove this.

The High Priest of the time presided over the Sanhedrim. Caiphas, therefore, now occupied that place. It was composed of the heads of the sacerdotal tribe, who were called princes of the priests, of the doctors of the law, of the scribes and elders of the Hebrew people.

At the time of Our Blessed Lord the Hebrew ruling classes, many of the Hebrew people themselves, and also the Sanhedrim, were divided into two factions, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were a puritanical sect, purists to the point of ridicule. Their fanatical zeal reached even to the meticulous in casuistry, and they made great ostentation of their own prayers in the temple and in public places, in their endeavor to impress the people with their sanctity. But underneath all this scrupulosity and devotion was hidden a heart of corruption, full of vices, of injustice and rapine. Hypocrites, whitened sepulchres, indeed they were, as Christ openly called them. The Baptist understood them well when he named them a race of vipers.

The Sadducees, on the contrary, were skeptics and epicureans. They denied the immortality of the soul and, as a consequence, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. They turned all their attention to the enjoyment of the present, observing, nevertheless, the outward prescriptions of the Law, especially such as tended towards public order, the peace of the community and the enjoyment of life. It is fairly certain that among this sect of the Sadducees were reckoned the high priests, Annas and Caiphas.

The religious sense of the Jewish people had fallen so low that it was evident on all sides, even among the priestly caste and the high priests of the Law. It was surely high time that the Son of God should come to dissipate these noxious mists of a perverted religious sentiment, whose direct consequences were to be seen

in the corruption of morals among all classes of the people.

As might be expected, the Sadducees were on good terms with the Romans, while the Pharisees detested the pagan conquerors of their country. Both parties, however, seemed to be in agreement about one thing, in fact all the world was of the same mind, that the time of the Christ, the great Messias, was near. The Great Council of the Sanhedrim was full of this expectation, clearly foretold in the sacred writings of the Prophets. But, as was to be expected, all these were interpreted in the sense that the Messias was to come as the glorious head of a liberated Hebrew nation, which, finally freed from the yoke of the stranger, should dominate all the peoples of the earth.

But when Jesus appeared before them and walked among them as a great Prophet, they ridiculed the idea, or even the possibility, of such a Messias. In fact, they not only ridiculed Him, but they hated Him with all the powers of their soul, chiefly, of course, because He unmasked their hypocrisy and revealed the viciousness of their hearts and the falsity of their doctrines. The more wonderful His works, the more obvious His miracles, the more they feared and detested Him, and they watched with jealous eyes the growing favor in which He was held by the poor and the multitude.

His novel interpretation of the Law and the Scriptures made them suspect Him as a dangerous innovator, very far, indeed, from their idea of the Christus, the Messias, Who naturally was of quite another character in their minds. They had the fixed idea that the Messias was to

be a great captain, a king who would free their nation from the hated yoke of the Romans. This young Prophet promised nothing of the kind, and, as they saw His influence growing in leaps and bounds, they began to feel that He would compromise them with the Roman authorities and thus aggravate their present condition. "Si dimittimus eum sic, omnes credent in eum; et venient Romani, et tollent nostrum locum, et gentem." (St. John xi, 48.) And since the high priests knew that this desire of liberation from the yoke of Rome was universal among the people, they used this suspicion to excite the multitude against Christ. And here we may quote the words of St. Augustine, who says: "To purchase the favor of Rome they lost everything, the redemption, their country, their very nationality."

True, they had seen with their very eyes the miracles and the wonderful prodigies of the Master, but in the face of that they did what is done even in our day. They explained them away; they surrounded them with a thousand doubts and criticisms. In vain Our Lord had said to them repeatedly: "The works that I do in the name of My Father, they give testimony of Me." (St. John x, 25.) "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though you will not believe Me, believe the works; that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (St. John x, 37, 38.)

What words could be more convincing than these? But when the passions of men are aroused and rule their very souls, they neither see nor hear correctly and so truth finds no path clear to the intelligence and the heart.

Thus Isaias predicted long ago and thus Our Blessed Lord Himself had spoken: "Hearing you shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see and shall not perceive." (St. Matthew XIII, 14.) From the Sanhedrim, the high tribunal of the Law, composed of such elements, moved by such motives, filled with a hatred against the Master, what justice could ever be expected in His regard? It was a court which, as we would say, was clearly liable to exception, formed as it was of judges unfit to judge because of prejudice.

After Christ had restored Lazarus to life, the members of the Sanhedrim gathered in secret council and decided upon a plot to get rid both of the Master and of Lazarus and thus bury forever the memory of this hated Galilean. Indeed, it was Caiphas, himself, who was the chief agitator of this horrible plot against Christ, for it was he who gave out the decision: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not." (St. John XI, 50.) It had been decided, therefore, that Christ should be sacrificed for the public good, and this decision came from these same judges who now were to hear His case. In a word, He had been adjudged guilty and sentenced to death even before His case was placed before them.

These were the judges of Christ! What a mockery of justice! Though they had decided that He should die, yet astutely enough they did not wish to kill Him on the great Festival of the Pasch for fear that it might arouse the people to a tumult. (St. Matthew XXVI, 5.) Nevertheless, when, two days before the Feast of the Passover,

the traitor Judas came to them secretly and offered to deliver Him into their hands, they suddenly changed their minds; and so, when Judas returned on the 14th Nisan urging them to hurry the affair, they decided to expedite the matter in such a way that the judgment, the sentence of death and the execution should take place before the great Sabbath of the Passover. Now there was no time to lose, for the great feast day was only twenty-four hours away.

The Mosaic law prohibited trial by night or on the vigil of a festival day. Nevertheless, Christ was dragged before the tribunal in the very middle of the night; indeed, the night preceding the great Jewish solemnity. There was irregularity in all these proceedings. The crime had been determined upon and could brook no delay.

Yet, through all these machinations the designs of God are clearly visible. The Jewish Passover was but a figure of the Christian Pasch. The blood of the lamb had saved the Hebrew people in Egypt from the sword of the avenging angel. Every year the chosen people renewed the memory of that sacred event. The lamb of the Passover was but an image of the Immaculate Lamb of God, Whose blood would redeem the whole human race. Blinded as they were by hatred and by passion, the Synagogue could not see that they were about to actually fulfill the prophecies in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Messias, Jesus Christ, upon the very day of their great Feast of the Passover.

They were eager to get rid of the Nazarene quietly so that the people gathered in such large numbers for the

Feast might not be aroused and thus give them trouble; and behold! they only succeeded in accomplishing just what they had striven to avoid, for the sacrifice of the Son of God took place before the eyes of the immense multitude of Jews gathered from all parts into the great Holy City to participate in the solemn Feast. They attempted to arrest Him secretly in the silence of the night, and before morning all Jerusalem was ringing with the news of the arrest of the Prophet of Galilee.

A View of Jerusalem

The vast and populous city was crowded for the Feast, and all about the walls was raised a great multitude of tents, occupied by those who had come from afar to participate in the great festival. Everyone was sleeping and silence ruled the night. The high priests, once decided that the Master should be captured and that sentence should be passed upon Him, immediately sent their messengers hither and thither to notify the members of the Sanhedrim, to summon them to their meeting. Other messengers were sent quickly and silently to collect the witnesses who were to testify against Christ. There was great haste everywhere, and at the same time great caution had to be used to give to the whole affair some sort of legal appearance in the eyes of the public.

They were shrewd enough not to expose themselves too openly to accusation of flagrant injustice and irregularity from the followers of the Nazarene; and besides, they knew that the Roman Governor would demand above all things the fulfillment of the proper legal process,

for it was the province of the Roman authorities, and not theirs, to pronounce sentence of death. And so there was running here and there through the city; there was knocking at the doors where the scribes and judges lived, and stealthy whisperings of secret messages to hasten as soon as possible to the hill of Sion, where the court was to sit.

Somehow, notwithstanding these attempts at secrecy and furtiveness, the rumor spread from house to house that something extraordinary had happened. The silence of the night was broken by swift murmurings from lip to lip. "What had happened? Something of great importance had transpired; some crime had been committed; some one had been arrested by the guards. Who? A great malefactor. But who? Oh, the new Prophet! What! Jesus of Nazareth? Ah, that impostor who tried to change our laws and our glorious traditions! Yes, but He performed miracles; He had many followers. What will they do with Him?" And so from lip to lip, and from house to house, the rumors ran. The friends of Christ were terrified; the enemies of the Nazarene laughed. Below, in the quarter Ophel, the people began to gather and to talk in whispers, and one could see that here Christ had many friends. There were sounds of hurrying footsteps here and there. Many doors were opened, and one could see in the light of quivering torches the shrouded forms of those who now began to mount the hill of Sion, hurrying towards the hall of the Sanhedrim.

Pilate, the Roman Governor, was soon informed of the rumors in the city and the rising tumult, and the Roman

soldiers guarding the city were doubled in strength of numbers.

The Apostles, who had fled at the moment of the Master's capture, wandered in terror hither and thither. This one stealthily sought a refuge where he might hide himself. Another moved noiselessly from place to place, bringing to the followers of the Nazarene the sad news. Others gathered their friends in little groups here and there and, weeping, endeavored to console each other in the thought of the terrible calamity that had happened. Peter and John, however, though they had left Christ when the guards bound Him, still secretly followed Him along the way at a discreet distance behind Him.

Doubtless, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had heard the sad news, perhaps from the lips of John, the Beloved Disciple. Indeed, some of the mystics think that, while Christ was undergoing His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, His Blessed Mother, with a clear presentiment of what was passing, suffered with Him and for Him in the deep grief of her soul. Since she knew of the solemn discourse of Christ in the Cenacle that evening, and since she understood that the sad moment predicted by Simeon had arrived, her pure soul felt that the dread hour was advancing, and she strengthened her heart to prepare herself for the sword of grief which was to pierce it. Soon, at her door came a hurried tapping and she listened to the whole horrible story of the capture of her Son and the barbarous treatment inflicted upon Him by the guards and the mob which had surrounded Him. Al-

ready the sharp sword of a terrible suffering had entered her gentle and pure heart.

Many of the pious women who had followed Jesus heard from one or another of the Apostles the terrible message. Desolation of spirit overcame them all. They knew not what to do, or where to go, and they wrung their hands as the bitter tears flowed down their quivering cheeks.

Judas, having witnessed the cruel treatment of Christ by the mob, already began to feel the dread terrors of remorse. Stricken with a deadly fear, fear of himself and fear of every man, coward as he was, he yet could not tear himself away from the sight of the Divine Victim of his treachery, and he, too, followed secretly the path taken by the guards along the road up towards Sion.

In the House of Annas

The guards who had arrested the Master, arrived at the top of the hill of Sion, stopped before the house of Annas, perhaps on account of the deference which they felt for the old High Priest or perhaps to allow time for the members of the Sanhedrim to gather. Annas was well pleased that Christ had been brought before him. In the body of that old fox was the heart of a tiger, and such was his hatred of the Galilean that he was happy to be the first to humiliate Him profoundly before consigning Him to the ushers of the Great Council. Perchance, too, there was in the mind of this cunning priest the thought that he might ensnare Him in a trap and thus the better prepare the way for His utter condemnation. He entered the

hall with a weary air and with solemnity of countenance and authority depicted upon his face, fringed with its long white beard. His appearance was calculated to impress the general public who so often think only of externals. He began at once to interrogate Jesus concerning His doctrine and His followers.

It was altogether irregular, legally, to thus question an accused man in such a way as to compel him to be a witness against himself. Annas' trap was set in vain. "Publicly have I spoken before the world," answered Christ. "I have talked in the open places and in the temple and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you interrogate me? Ask those who heard what I have spoken. They know what I have said."

From this the Master made it perfectly clear that He had no secret doctrines to propagate and no plots or conspiracies to contrive. He had lived His whole life and had spoken what He had to say in the broad light of day. The answer of Jesus made all this perfectly clear to the High Priest and there was no way out of it. But Annas was too clever not to realize that he had begun badly.

It was a public, legal blunder and his pride was smitten by the retort of Christ. Everyone was silent. No one dared to answer the Master, for they had seen often enough the futility of an attempt to contradict Him. But the silence was too humiliating to endure. Brute force was the only method left to them, and so one of the officials of the court, stepping forward, gave Jesus a blow in the face, saying: "Answerest Thou the High Priest so?" (St. John XVIII, 22.) Now the law prohibited

absolutely such insults to those on trial and punished such actions when they happened; but in the case of Jesus everything was legal, every license was legalized. The Master, not willing to lie under the imputation of having been lacking in respect to the High Priest, turning towards him who had struck Him, said, in a calm voice: "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil, but if well, why strikest thou Me?" Such patience, such calm and noble endurance, such a perfectly just question to one who had been so unjust to Him!

By these words the accusation of disrespect to the High Priest was demolished, and by His calm attitude and noble words Christ humiliated all the more both the villain who had treated Him so outrageously and the judge who had allowed such utterly illegal action in his presence. Utterly confused by the noble and dignified attitude of the Galilean, Annas realized the futility of continuing the case, so he gave orders to bind the Master with cords, and this, too, contrary to the laws which obligated the judges to respect the liberty of the accused. And thus bound, Annas sent Him to the house of Caiphas, where already had gathered the members of the Sanhedrim. (St. Matthew XXVI, 57.)

As every incident in the Passion of Our Blessed Lord has been meditated upon for centuries by holy souls, and as no part of this sad story is ever considered trivial, the question has been asked: "Who was it that struck Our Lord as He stood before Annas?" St. Chrysostom writes that it was the same Malchus whom Peter had struck

with his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Sacred Text of the Evangelist says nothing concerning this, but there is this to be noted, that the one whose ear Peter cut off with his sword is called a servant of the High Priest, that is, a slave, whereas the one who struck Jesus in the house of Annas is called an assistant of the ministers, and, therefore, one of the officials of the court.

We note this merely in passing, and we can only hope that Malchus, whose ear had been healed by the touch of Christ, did not so soon forget the goodness of his Benefactor. But what were the sentiments which agitated the soul of this insolent assistant to the tribunal when he heard the calm and sweet but utterly just answer of Christ to him? St. John Chrysostom affirms expressly that the grace of God entered his soul with these words of Christ and opened his eyes to the light of divine truth.

In the house of Annas the faithful later erected a chapel in honor of the Holy Angels, and St. Quaresmius, in his celebrated work on the Holy Land, published in 1626, says that he had read in a very ancient document that this chapel was built and dedicated to the Holy Angels, because these spirits of God, who accompanied Christ everywhere, covered their faces in shame when the official of the court gave Christ the blow in the face.

To-day this place is in the possession of the Armenians, once Catholics, now schismatics. They have their cathedral near by, on the spot where the Apostle, James the Greater, was beheaded.

The House of Caiphas

On the hill of Sion between the house of Annas and the Cenacle was situated the house of the High Priest Caiphas. This, too, is now in the possession of the schismatic Armenians. At the present time these two houses are separated from one another by the wall of Jerusalem, but in the time of Our Lord they were joined by pretty groves and pleasant gardens. That the house of Caiphas was situated here is a constant tradition which has come down to us certainly from the time of the Crusades, and is to-day generally admitted as true.

At the present time there is situated upon this spot a little church dedicated to St. Peter, or rather to the Penitence of St. Peter, and in an angle in the wall one sees a grotto called "The Prison of the Lord." Indeed, it is well understood that between the first and the second trial of Christ before Caiphas He was put into a cell and kept there a prisoner during the interval. There is some discussion still as to the exact site of the house of Caiphas, but all agree that, if it was not on this particular spot, it was, nevertheless, very near it.

This dwelling followed the usual style of such houses in the Orient. It was arranged about two courtyards, surrounded with porticoes, onto which the windows and doors opened. The first courtyard was given over to the servants and the slaves and the strangers; the second, raised above it by a few steps and entered through a large door, was reserved for the habitation of the High Priest, where was situated the great hall of the Sanhedrim. In the midst

of the first and outer courtyard was a great fireplace in the open air, in which a fire usually burned when the season was cold, and about this fireplace the servants and slaves were accustomed to gather to warm themselves. The gate of the entrance to the house was guarded by a female slave (ancilla ostiaria), and this door opened upon a large hall, the vestibule, so-called, through which, by another door, one entered into the first or lower courtyard. Thus in brief and in a very general way is described the house of Caiphas.

Christ before Caiphas

In the great hall of the house of Caiphas the Sanhedrim had already gathered when Jesus arrived. We may be quite sure that those few members of the Council who were known to favor Christ had not been invited to attend on this occasion. In fact, as the Sacred Text tells us, the condemnation of Christ was unanimous. The mystic, Catherine Emmerich, affirms that Caiphas received the Master with words of scorn and upbraided Him for the disturbance He had caused him on so holy a night. At the sight of Christ a low murmur of disdain passed over the assembly, which augured little hope of justice. Upon the faces of the high priests and the old men who surrounded them one could read all the signs of a dread hatred. No place here for justice or mercy. These were not judges, but murderers!

In the middle of the great hall stood Christ. The pallor of death was on His sacred countenance, and behind His back His hands were tied with rough cords.

About Him were the guards, near by were the notaries and students of the law, and in the rear of the hall were the servants of the court and a motley crowd of the curious, who had come to see what they could of the spectacle.

First the witnesses were called. As they testified one after the other, it was perfectly clear that they contradicted each other, time and again, and, in fact, frequently contradicted themselves. (St. Mark XIV, 56.)

Towards the end two witnesses stepped forth who said: "He said, and we have heard Him say: 'I can destroy this temple and in three days I can rebuild it.'" One of them said that Christ's words were: "I can destroy"; the other said that His words were: "I shall destroy." The fact is that the words of Christ, narrated by St. John, were: "Destroy this temple and in three days I shall rebuild it." In other words, not He, but others should be the cause of the destruction. In reality He had spoken, not of the material temple of the Jews, but of His own Body, foretelling thus His Resurrection. And it is perfectly clear now that the Pharisees and the whole Sanhedrim understood well what Christ meant by those words, for after His death they placed a guard at His sepulchre, recalling precisely these words as predicting the Resurrection of Christ after His death.

The First and Second Denials of St. Peter

While the foregoing scene was taking place in the hall of the Sanhedrim, something quite different was happening in the courtyard outside. Peter and John, after having followed at some distance the footsteps of Our

Blessed Lord, came quietly into the house of the High Priest. John, knowing the place and the people there, went into the house, but Peter stood outside at the gateway. John, noticing that Peter had not followed him into the house, came out again and made a sign to the servant at the door to allow Peter to enter. Coming into the courtyard he went and sat down among the servants and strangers who were gathered about the fire in the middle of the courtyard, for that night was very cold.

Poor Peter, he was so utterly confused that he scarcely knew what he was doing. So many things had happened in so brief a space that he seemed benumbed and almost stupefied. For the moment, at least, he had forgotten the solemn warning of Christ. It was bitter cold without, and his heart was colder still with fear and anxiety, and so he huddled with the others about the fireplace, hoping silently to see what would happen to the Master. Where now was he, Peter who had boasted that he would go with Christ even unto death? Poor Peter, full of natural affection and impetuosity, but mindful so little of his own weakness, which soon began so to betray him!

Just then one of the servants who guarded the entrance, struck by the expression of his sad face in the light of the fire, grew suspicious, and, turning to him, she said: "Are you one of the followers of this Man?" And, turning to the others about the fire, she said to them in a loud voice: "Why, certainly this man was with the Nazarene." And Peter, at once off guard, quickly answered: "No, no, I know Him not. I understand not at all what you say." Here was a denial, direct, absolute. He began to feel the

embarrassment of his position. He stood up and, going out of the door, stopped in the vestibule, and the cock crew for the first time. (St. Mark XIV, 68.) Covered with confusion, he thought that here he would escape all notice, but he only went from one danger to another. Very soon another servant of the house set eyes upon him. His fear only made her all the more suspicious. She watched him closely, and soon she, too, exclaimed: "You were with Jesus of Nazareth"; and a man standing near, hearing the servant, echoed her words: "Are you one of the followers of this Man?" For the second time Peter denied the Lord, this time with an oath. He attempted to escape the importunate questionings of the maid and the man, and he wandered about through the house, still unable to go away from the presence of Christ.

Poor Peter, what a pitiable spectacle! He loved the Master dearly, but somehow, with all his love, he was weak when the trial came. His impetuosity of character was constantly placing him in danger of himself; he seemed never to understand the peril of the situation into which he rushed. He knew that his own love was strong, but he counted too much upon himself; and so he fell, as everyone falls who confides too much in his own strength and exposes himself rashly to danger.

The First Condemnation of Christ

The chattering of the witnesses with their continual contradictions left Christ still silent before His judges. The majestic calm of that silence, the pity which His position inspired, made a solemn impression upon the

crowd that had gathered within the hall, and murmurs of sympathy began to be heard among them. But Caiphas was on the watch, and, quick to detect the growing sentiment in favor of Christ, he suddenly arose and came and stood before Him. Christ's silence was a torture to the High Priest. He was determined to break it: "Answerest Thou nothing to the things that are laid to Thy charge by these men?" (St. Mark xiv, 60.)

How utterly bereft of shame must he have been to take such a step, which was clearly against every canon of the law, which prescribed that, when the witnesses contradicted each other, nothing was proved and the accused should be dismissed. But there was no thought in the mind of Caiphas to dismiss the Galilean; so, like Annas, he determined to provoke Him to discussion, which might at least compromise Him before the crowd. To the words of Caiphas Christ listened, but gave no answer. "Ille autem tacebat." (St. Mark xiv, 61.) At last a sudden light dawned upon the mind of Caiphas. Had not the Nazarene pretended to be the Messias? If only he could provoke Him now to make that same declaration, He would be at once condemned as a blasphemer. At all costs, therefore, he determined thus to trap the Master.

Now the law prohibited this method of procedure and punished it with a sentence of nullity; but what cared Caiphas for the law when it stood in the way of his own purposes? And so, taking his solemn stand and assuming great majesty of pose, he put his demand according to the sacred formula which no Jew could ever ignore. Raising both hands towards Heaven, he said to the Nazarene:

I adjure Thee by the living God, tell me, art Thou the Christ, the Son of God?" Mark well the words. No doubt he intended to say: "Dost Thou pretend to be the Christ?" But as if against his own will he put the direct question: "Art Thou the Christ?"

Over the great hall reigned a profound silence. Scarcely a breath was heard, and all the eyes of those present were fixed upon the young Prophet standing there before the High Priest, immobile, pallid, His clear eyes fixed upon Caiphas. Calmly, with a voice ineffably grave and solemn He answered: "Thou hast said it. I am He. Indeed, I say to thee that one day thou shalt see the Son of Man at the right hand of the power of God coming in the clouds of Heaven."

At last! At last! The answer, direct and clear, had been given. There could be no further room for misunderstanding. Jesus, the Son of Man, called Himself also God. Chained and bound before His human judges He wished to speak to them and prefigure to them the last judgment of all, when He, coming upon the clouds of Heaven, should be the final Judge from Whom there was no appeal. The boldness of this open profession, so sublime, was equaled only by the perfect calm and absolute sureness with which it was spoken. A thrill of consternation passed over the whole assembly. They felt profoundly that they were face to face with something supremely solemn which no words could express.

Caiphas, though for the moment confounded, soon recovered and came back to his predetermined line of action. Standing in open court he gave vent to the most

unseemly exhibition of anger, and seizing violently his priestly robes he tore them into shreds. This was the dramatic signal of horror at hearing words of blasphemy against God. "He hath blasphemed!" he cried in rage. "What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy: what think you?" (St. Matthew XXVI, 65–66.) Roused by the words and action of Caiphas, the Council, recovering from the surprise with which Christ's declaration had for the moment shocked them, arose and filled the hall with shouts: "He is guilty of death!"

Thus the sentence was passed. Christ was condemned to death as a blasphemer for having said in truth that which He was, that which He had always declared Himself to be, that which all His prodigies and works had proved Him to be. All the testimony against Him had failed utterly. That was too clear even to the eyes of the conspirators themselves; but now He had testified against Himself by declaring clearly and unmistakably that He was the Man-God.

Thus Christ became Himself the first Confessor of the new faith and was soon to become its first Martyr. Let us bow our heads and our hearts before the Son of God made Man for our redemption, and full of faith and love let us adore Him Whom the angels adored.

"He is guilty of death!" (St. Matthew XXVI, 66.) As this cry arose on all sides, the assembly abandoned themselves to the most brutal exhibitions of savage cruelty. Rushing from their places to where Jesus stood calmly and imperturbably in the midst of the hall, they seized

upon their patient Victim. Up to that time He had been in a certain way under the protection of the majesty of the law, but now nothing could protect Him further. The law had been fulfilled and the sentence passed. Now He was no longer the accused, but the condemned. Their faces were distorted with anger; they surrounded Him shouting ineffable insults; they spat in His face and rained blow upon blow upon His tender frame. (St. Mark XIV, 65.)

Let us close our eyes at the sight of this horrible spectacle.

Soon their brutality turned to derision and scorn. They bandaged His eyes and covered His face, and then, striking Him with their clenched fists, they shouted: "O Christ! now guess who has struck Thee. Prophesy! Prophesy! Thou Who callest Thyself the Christ."

According to the law of Christian civilization, even the condemned is in a way sacred under the law: "Res sacra reus." But with the Jews, one condemned to death, especially as a blasphemer, became at once the target of every insult and injury that could be heaped upon him. Indeed, according to the doctrines of the Synagogue it was prohibited for anyone to feel any compassion for him whatever. For months the princes and the high priests had been forced to hide the fearful rage they felt against Jesus, and their anger mounted and mounted until it became a terrific strain upon them to conceal it. Now they need conceal it no longer, and they turned upon Him, defenseless and innocent as He was, the whole dreadful torrent of their brutal wrath.

The Third Denial of St. Peter

It is quite possible, indeed, probable, that both Peter and John had by this time entered the hall of the Sanhedrim and were present at the condemnation of Christ. Doubtless, too, the Beloved Disciple at that moment was thinking of the grief of the Master's Holy Mother, Mary, and so, trembling with horror, yet impelled by a sacred sentiment of duty, he glided out of the house of Caiphas and, staggering, went with labored steps to convey the sad news to Mary.

Peter, dazed at the awful spectacle, felt himself pulled hither and thither by the impulses of his heart. He could not make up his mind entirely to go away from the dreadful scene, and yet he could stand no longer the awful sight of the cruelty now hurled against the Master. And so, groping his way out of the hall, he wandered about the courtyard, and finally, overcome by fatigue and weakness, again he went back to warm himself at the fire, around which the rabble had gathered, waiting, as the rabble always does, with the expectation of curiosity to know what was happening within.

It is strange how little, at times, experience guides us in our actions! Peter certainly should have remembered what had happened at that very place only a short time before, but it is safe to say that he scarcely knew what he was doing. He wanted to go and he wanted to stay. He was torn between both desires. And while he was thus seized with a sort of stupor, he heard one of the men near him say in a loud voice: "You are a Galilean, one

of those followers of the Nazarene." Evidently Peter began to mutter some words of half explanation, and, as soon as those about the fire heard him speak, they began to laugh and taunt him, saying: "Oh, certainly you are a Galilean. Your very speech betrays you."

It was well known among the Jews that the Galileans had an accent of their own, and they dressed, besides, in a manner different from the rest of the nation. Confused even more by this discovery, Peter, still on the defensive, began to manifest his irritation and, no doubt, also his fear of the rabble about him. "I know nothing of this Man," he said. "I know Him not. I am no follower of His." But he could not escape so easily as this. The crowd now began to gather around him, seeing that some disturbance was taking place, and among that group was one of the band who had come out with swords and sticks to seize the Master. Pushing through the little crowd around Peter, he at once recognized him as the one who had struck off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. Planting himself before the face of Peter, he looked at him with scorn and said: "You do not know this Man? You are no follower of His? What do you mean? Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

And now, completely overcome by the terror of the situation in which he found himself, he lost all control of himself and, with his usual impetuosity, began to swear with an oath that he knew nothing of this Man, that he was no follower of His, and this he repeated vigorously several times, swearing as he spoke.

Just at that time the guards, tired of raining their

fierce blows upon the Master, led Him out into the courtyard, in the midst of which Peter stood, still wrangling with the rabble about him and denying his Master. The soldiers were now leading Jesus across the courtyard towards the cell in which He would be held until the second trial, prescribed by the Jewish law; for before this second trial no criminal could be condemned to death legally.

As the guards, with Christ in their midst, left the hall and entered the courtyard, the rabble and the curiosity-seekers gathered around Peter were quick to notice what was happening, and instantly all eyes were riveted upon the Victim as He passed them. Jesus, pallid as death with weakness and oppressed by the awful weight of the sadness which bore Him down, the traces of the spittle of the soldiers still upon His Sacred Face, His clothing rent and disordered, passed through the courtyard in the midst of the murmurs and chattering of the rabble.

Peter, the oath of denial still upon his lips, raised his eyes, too, to see what was passing, and, oh, the sight that met his eyes! "And immediately the cock crew again." (St. Mark XIV, 72.) And as it crowed the Master turned and looked at Peter. "Et conversus Dominus respexit Petrum." (St. Luke XXII, 61.) It was about three o'clock in the morning. At the sound of the crowing of the cock, at the sight of that glance of the Master, a thrill of horrible remorse shook Peter, mind and soul and body. That moment would remain forever indelible in the soul of the Prince of the Apostles.

In that glance of Jesus, Peter could read volumes. It

was the most potent reproach, bringing terror to the heart, but it was at the same time a reproach filled with tenderness and sweetness, bringing, with the terror, the divine grace of remorse and sorrow; a remorse and sorrow which, until he gave his life up for the Master, was never absent from his mind and his heart.

Torn with an immense anguish, he remembered now the words of Christ: "This night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice." O God, what a terrible sin! He had abandoned his adorable Master, He Whom he had loved so much, He Whom he had believed to be the Son of God. At the thought of his infamous crime he was seized with a mortal terror. But this terror did not bring with it the added sin of despair. Oh! no, for in that moment of shame he remembered those other words of Christ when He told him that He had prayed for him that, being once converted, his faith should never again fail. And that tender and benign expression upon the face of the Master, even as He looked at Peter with a gentle rebuke, was it not full of hope and mercy?

A tumult of various thoughts filled his mind. His own shame, his perfidy, his abandonment of Christ overwhelmed him. Yet at the same time the sight of Christ's tender face assured him of forgiveness. Torn with grief and sorrow and shame at the thought of his Master's infinite goodness and his own ineffable infidelity, he sobbed until his frame shook with emotion and a torrent of tears flooded his eyes. The thought of his own rashness in exposing himself to danger was now clear to him and he rushed out across the courtyard into the street with

only one thought in his mind, to fly from it all, to get away from the horror which obsessed him, to leave this awful crowd, this mean and vulgar rabble, this house of injustice and cruelty, and to wander far and away, far, and ever farther from men, to find some solitary place where he could weep the bitter tears of repentance, and make amends in some way for his awful crime.

He saw now that the cause of it all was his own miserable impetuosity, his foolish conceit in his own strength. Now he saw his utter weakness, and he realized now to the full the meaning of those words of his Master: "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

At the southern extremity of the hill of Sion, on the side towards the east, the early Christians erected a little chapel to which they gave the name of St. Peter, "In Galli Cantu"; and the tradition runs that in a grotto near by this place Peter abandoned himself to the fullness of his grief.

When Jesus was led across the courtyard, He was imprisoned in a cell to await there His second trial. That would not be until early morning, so there were still a few hours to wait. But oh, what long hours these were!

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND JUDGMENT OF THE SANHEDRIM

Once locked in the prison house the guards had the Master at their mercy. They were a cruel lot at best, so we may well imagine what sort of mercy they showed Christ.

Though the Evangelists make no mention of it, it is a perfectly well-authenticated tradition that these savage soldiers amused themselves during the rest of the night by binding Christ to a column and then offering Him every sort of ill treatment. Concerning this column of the flagellation on Sion there are extant well-authenticated documents giving clear testimony to this part of the Passion.

The Pilgrim of Bordeaux in the year 333 records that, passing from the Cenacle, he went to the house of Caiphas and there venerated the column to which Christ had been bound and then beaten. St. Sylvia, whose itinerary was lately discovered in the library of Arezzo, narrates that at some time, about the year 350, she assisted at the functions of Holy Week in Jerusalem, and she goes on to describe that on Good Friday, after the Mass of the Cross celebrated very early in the morning, the pilgrims went up to Sion to pray before the column to which Christ had been bound during His flagellation.

We have, too, the testimony of St. Jerome about the year 404, who, in his letter to Eustachius called "The

Epitaph of Paula," narrates in detail the journey of this noble Roman matron to the Holy Land. Thus he writes: "From the hill Moria she went up to Mount Sion, where is the fortress of King David. There she saw a column supporting the portico of the church, and this column was the one to which the Lord had been bound during His flagellation, the traces of blood still being visible upon it. She then went to the place where the Spirit of God had descended upon the disciples gathered therein, that is to say, the Cenacle."

It is clear from this description that the church where the holy column of the flagellation was situated was entirely distinct from the Cenacle. It would seem to follow from this that the chapel here alluded to, where the column had been placed, was that dedicated to St. Peter, erected by the first Christians in the house of Caiphas. It may seem strange that this sacred column should be used to support the portico of a church, but evidently in the construction of this church the faithful utilized all the columns of the courtyard of Caiphas, and among them was this one also.

We have, besides this, the testimony of the so-called Anonymous of Piacenza, otherwise known as the martyr Antonine. In this itinerary, written about the year 570, we read: "Going up to Sion we find the house of Caiphas, the High Priest, and there still is the column to which Christ had been bound during His flagellation."

It is, therefore, historically certain that there was on Mount Sion a column venerated as that to which Christ had been bound during the flagellation, but we must not

confound this one with the column of scourging in the prætorium. They are two distinct columns and both were held in great reverence for centuries. It appears that this column found on Sion in the house of Caiphas was afterwards broken into various pieces, and some of these fragments, about the year 1550, were sent by the Custodian of the Holy Land to various princes in Europe, to Pope Paul IV, to the Emperor, to Philip II of Spain, and to the Republic of Venice, for the purpose of interesting them in the liberation of the holy places.

And so tradition makes it clear that among the other insults and injuries offered to Our Blessed Lord during that sad night of His Passion was also this one of being tied, bound to a pillar and cruelly scourged.

Finally the sun rose and the great day predicted by the Prophets, expected for centuries, and established from all eternity by the justice and mercy of God, the day of the great expiation and of our deliverance, at last arrived. On that eventful day, unique in history, was to triumph the adorable Son of God on earth. On that day Hell trembled and the gates of Heaven were opened for all men of good will.

The Master, still bound to a column in His prison cell, though overcome with suffering and weakness, looked out upon the dawning day and, trembling, saluted it. His heart was filled with sorrow in anticipation of all the insult and injury that the day would bring Him. Still a smile spread over His Sacred Countenance at the sight of the rising sun, and He longed, even as He longed to eat

the Pasch with His disciples, for the completion of His divine mission on earth.

Meanwhile, the household of Caiphas began to wake and the whole place felt the stir of life again, and one could hear the patter of footsteps on the stones of the courtyard. The guards, the ministers of the court, and the soldiers were gathering in the great hall again for the second judgment. The first trial, carried on precipitously in the night, was palpably illegal, and the people would soon discover that for themselves. But the second trial in the calm of the early morning, after time for reflection, would not have this same appearance of illegality.

The Jewish law forbade the court to sentence anyone to death upon a single trial. A second one was always required on the following day. So these actors, desirous to preserve at least the forms of legality, though in substance they had violated it, decided to have the second trial in the early morning, pretending that the first trial had taken place the night before, whereas in reality it was only a few short hours before they assembled for the second tribunal. And why were they so eager to preserve the appearances of legality when in reality they were only too eager to dispense with all legal formalities and to get rid of this "impostor" who caused such tumult among the people?

First of all, they knew very well the dread consequences that would follow an illegal condemnation to death. They pretended to care little for the people, but in reality they feared them intensely, and they knew that Jesus had some followers of great influence. But, besides that, there

was even a more potent reason which made them careful of the legality of their acts. They knew that up there in the fortress of Antonia was the Roman Governor with his cohorts, and Rome then, as always, stood firmly and rigidly for all the formalities of the law. And since they had to go to the Roman Governor to obtain the execution of their sentence, they were shrewd enough to pave the way for that permit by the observance of all the legal forms. So the Sanhedrim gathered once more to carry out the formalities of the second trial of the Master.

Just where did this second meeting take place? Was it in the house of Caiphas or in the hall of the Sanhedrim? St. Luke says: "And as soon as it was day, the ancients of the people and the chief priests and scribes came together; and they brought Him into their Council." (St. Luke XXII, 66.) The seat of the Sanhedrim, up to forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, was in the marble palace called Gazith, contiguous to the temple on its south side.

In that year the tribunal was transferred to another site below the temple in a palace of the Tyropœon, not far from the prætorium. Some writers, as Ollivier and Meistermann, think that it was here that the second trial of Christ took place. Still one may well doubt this opinion, inasmuch as the place of the council could also have been in the house of Caiphas.

In fact St. John clearly says: "They led Jesus from Caiphas to the governor's hall." (St. John XVIII, 28.) It is clear from this that they left the house of Caiphas to go to the prætorium. In the house of Caiphas, therefore,

the second trial took place. This opinion seems the more natural and conforms more readily to tradition and can easily be reconciled with the words of St. Luke.

And now we see Christ once more standing before this mockery of a court. Putting aside every formality, Caiphas went straight to the point, the same point which the night before he had found such a convenient plot to trap the Master. "Tell us," he says — and we can hear the cruelty of his voice, we can see the proud violence of his countenance — "tell us, art Thou the Christ?" The Master, still calm, with a level voice answered, remembering well what had happened when He answered this same question only a few hours ago: "If I shall tell you, you will not believe Me, and if I shall also ask you, you will not answer Me nor let Me go." Here Christ clearly referred to the prophecies regarding the Messias, which they were supposed to know very well, and which, if they opened their eyes, they could see clearly were all verified in Him. They were the doctors of the Law. He might well put many a question to them which, if they answered without guile, would clearly prove His case. But He knew, as He tells them, that, even though He asked them these questions, they would not answer Him.

They had only one thought in mind; that was not the verification of prophecies, but to get rid of Him at any cost. And so to remove from them every excuse of ignorance and to impress them at the same time with the salutary fear of the consequences of their unjust action, He immediately added, as at the time of the first trial: "And you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right

hand of the power of God" (St. Mark XIV, 62), alluding clearly to the final judgment of all men, where at least true justice would prevail and not the mockery of mere form, as was happening here.

But nothing could soften their obdurate hearts, and Caiphas continued more insolently than ever: "Art Thou, therefore, the Son of God?" And Jesus answered: "You say it. I am." Again the same hypocritical acting; again the same wrath as at the former trial. "What further need of testimony have we?" they cried. "We have heard it from His own mouth." Note again that, unknown to themselves, they were fulfilling the designs of God. They did not say: "Do you pretend to be the Son of God?" but, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" The crowd, now aroused by the greatest curiosity, had entered the hall of the tribunal and before them all Christ made the solemn affirmation of His Divinity.

Evidently the words of Christ produced a tremendous impression upon these people, and, as the murmuring grew louder and louder, the judges, seized with fear, were terrified lest there be an uprising among the people by which He would be taken out of their hands. They suddenly arose, bound the Master and dragged Him hurriedly to the prætorium, where Pilate, the Roman Governor, presided.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRÆTORIUM

To go from the house of Caiphas to the prætorium it was necessary to traverse the most populous portion of the Holy City. During the night the news of the capture of the great Prophet of Nazareth had spread from lip to lip and house to house all over the city. By morning the whole population was in great excitement. Jerusalem was filled to overflowing with all classes of Jews for the Passover. Among them all, there was now only one topic of conversation. They had heard the rumors of the condemnation of the Master at the first trial, and so, when the second trial took place, great crowds of people gathered about the place, some friendly to Christ, some hateful, others quite indifferent, but all anxious to see how this affair would end.

A procession was formed at the head of which walked Annas and Caiphas. After them came the members of the Sanhedrim in all the pomp of their office, clothed in their priestly robes, hoping thus to impress Pilate with the solemnity of the occasion. Then followed the guards and the police, and in the midst of these was the Nazarene, bound in chains, His clothing in disorder, His face discolored by the blows — truly a sorry sight.

This cortège was accompanied by a great mass of the people, the mob and the rabble of the city. From this

scum of the population arose the coarsest words of insult and the vilest epithets.

The high priests, as they went along, spoke to the people, and by their accusations against the Master sought to excite them against Him. "Here is a blasphemer," said they. "This is the impostor Who was going to destroy our holy temple. Here is the conspirator who plotted to deliver Israel into the hands of the Romans." The crowd, hearing these accusations from those whose office they had been taught to revere, were aroused to a pitch of fanatical hatred. Outrage succeeded outrage. They picked up stones on the street and threw them at this One, found to be an enemy of their nation, a traitor in Israel.

Oh, the fickleness of the crowd, then as now, always and ever! Only a few days ago in these very streets of Jerusalem the people had spread palms in His way. They had filled the air with shouts of "Hosanna!" They had declared Him blessed Who had come in the name of the Lord. Where were they all now? Ah, the friends in sunshine leave us when the clouds lower about us.

On the day of the palms they had beheld Him radiant and powerful, and the crowd loves the sight of power and prosperity. To-day He is bound, deformed and bent with weakness, and at the sight of such misery the faith which depended on prosperity vanished. How could this man, this wretched criminal, be a king and prophet, the Messias, the Son of God? It was all too absurd. They had been deceived. A few there were who remained faithful in misfortune, but, as always, they were a very,

very few. The rest, victims of the demagogues who knew how to lead them on, went with the current, and the applause of yesterday was changed to-day into the cry of death.

It is easy to blame the fickle crowd which yesterday raised their voices in His favor and to-day condemned Him, but is it very different to-day? Of course, the Hebrew people had no excuse for this perfidy. Under their very eyes Christ had wrought His wonderful miracles, the wonderful deeds which testify to His Divinity. How could they so soon forget? Alas! how often we forget ourselves! Many times since then the mob has stoned its Saviour, and God sometimes permits such outrages to happen to make us realize what a weak thing, what a fickle and unreliable thing is popularity, the changing favor of a changing mood of an ever-changeful populace.

Abandoned by His own disciples, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter in the midst of that seething crowd filled with fanatical hatred, without a single one to raise a hand in His defense or utter a word of compassion for this innocent Victim, Jesus was surely at that time utterly alone. "I have trodden the wine press alone and of the Gentiles there is not a man with Me." (Isaias LXIII, 3.)

The Divine Redeemer of mankind, in the fulfillment of the prophecies, stood alone in His dire combat with sin, and alone He must face and conquer death. We cannot here forget His Blessed Mother and the pious women of His little flock who, with the Apostle John, followed the footsteps of Jesus, their souls filled with the bitterest anguish.

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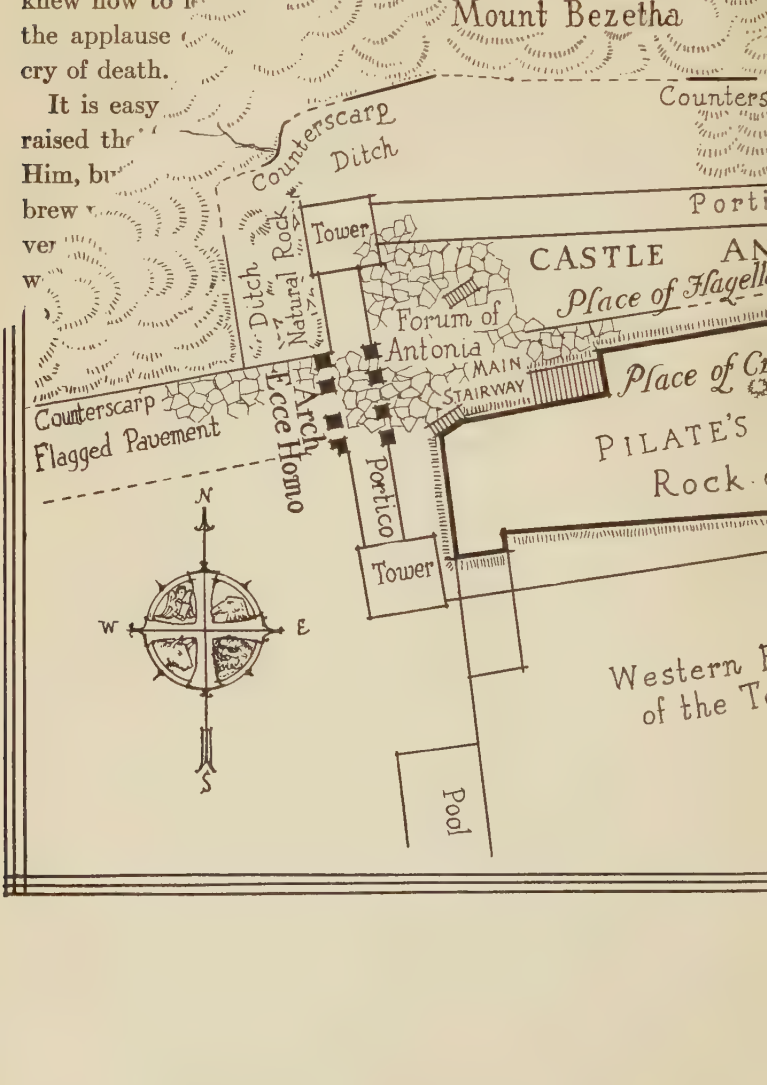

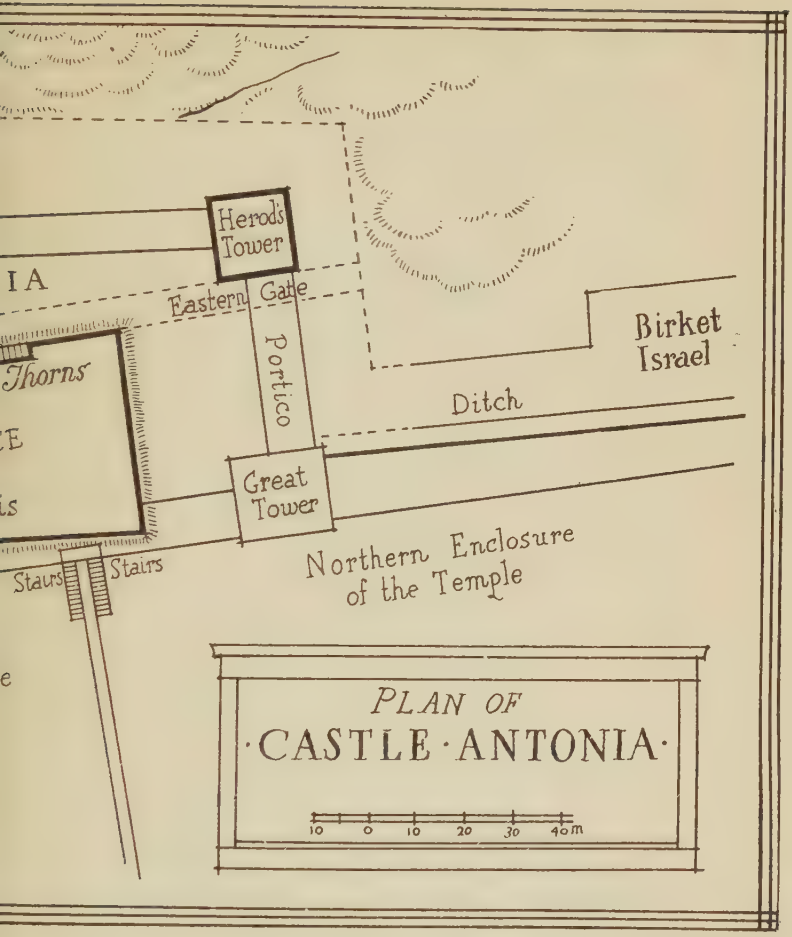
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The Fortress Antonia and the Prætorium

Let us turn for a moment from this sad narration to a description of the place in which these things were happening. We have them practically before our eyes in the writings of ancient authors, especially Josephus Flavius, who saw the city and all its wonderful palaces and temples in all their splendor, and we can gather much from those who have studied the ruins which still exist. Immediately to the north of the square of the temple, upon a high rock one hundred and ten meters long and sixty meters wide, Herod had erected his palace, which was at the same time a fortress and a royal dwelling. Josephus Flavius says that Herod employed in the building of that place all the resources of his genius and all the wealth at his command. He hewed down the stone on all sides of the rock so that that palace was a castle elevated on high.

That mass of rock still exists, and above it to-day after various transformations have taken place there is a large barracks. In the midst of the palace thus situated there was a large atrium, or courtyard, and it was here that Our Lord was crowned with thorns. To commemorate this the Crusaders erected here a little oratory crowned with a cupola, which is still extant.

At the entrance and exit to the palace Herod had constructed two great staircases. One of these on the south side led to the square of the temple, and the remains of this are still visible. It was on these steps that St. Paul later, menaced by the Jews, stood and addressed them. (Acts xxii.) The other stairs, the principal exit from the

palace, were towards the north and led to the forum of Antonia and the public street.

These stairs still exist and are used to-day as an entrance to the barracks, held, until the English took Palestine, by the Turkish soldiers. This stairway is a wide and easy ascent cut out of the side of the rock. Herod had covered these steps with marble, as Josephus Flavius writes, and these are the steps, very probably, known as "Scala Santa," removed later to Rome, according to venerable tradition. The palace of Herod, therefore, was the watch-tower of the temple, as the temple was the watch-tower of the city.

When the Roman Governor, on the occasion of popular festivals or the Passover, came up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, his ordinary residence was the palace of Herod, which was called the prætorium, because there the Procurator held his tribunal and gave sentence.

This palace, however, was only a part of the grandiose construction of Herod. At the north of the palace was a series of buildings where the cavalry and infantry used to lodge, and the whole place was surrounded with a thick wall, the remains of which are still visible. From the lower part of the city, that is, from the valley called Tyropœon, an ancient road climbed along the way under the fortress or palace of Herod and then descended on the opposite side to the brook Cedron.

This road still exists and passes under the central arch of the antique gate known as the "Arch of the Ecce Homo." On either side of this central gate are two other gates. The one on the right is scarcely visible, as it is in-

cluded in the walls of the house of the Turkish dervishes, but the gate on the left, now a part of the Convent of the Ladies of Sion, is entirely visible.

At the time of Christ, just beyond the great gate of the fortress Antonia a large square opened out surrounded by porticoes, which was used as the lower courtyard of the palace, and here the soldiers lodged and took their exercises. The pavement of this courtyard is still visible in the cellar of the Convent of the Ladies of Sion. This piazza, called also the forum, is undoubtedly the Lithostrotos (pavement of stone) of the Gospel, also called in Hebrew Gabbatha, that is to say, high place.

From this piazza, not far from the Arch of the Ecce Homo, mounted the great staircase which was the principal ingress to the palace of Herod. With this description before our eyes we will understand more clearly the narration of the events which took place there.

The First Trial by Pilate

It was morning when Christ came to the fortress Antonia, and indeed it was very early in the morning, about six o'clock, for the Romans usually began their judicial hearings at sunrise. On their part the high priests were anxious to start matters early in the morning in order that they might finish it all before the evening, when began the great Sabbath of the Passover; for it was absolutely forbidden to carry on a trial or to put anyone to death on the vigil of the Passover. That day was given up to the great feast and to rejoicing among the people.

The solemn cortège with the rabble following came to a

halt in the piazza under the palace of Herod, and, pushing Jesus forward towards the foot of the great stairway of the palace, they did not enter lest they should be contaminated by Gentile contact and thus be prevented from eating the Passover. (St. John XVIII, 28.)

The Jews were prohibited to visit the houses of infidels, as they considered that a danger to their faith, but at the time which we are describing, the Pharisees and the doctors of the Law had carried this prescription to excess. Even to enter the house of a pagan constituted legal uncleanness, in which condition the Jew must abstain from every act of worship and therefore from taking part in the Passover, unless by sacrifice and other rites he was purified.

It is clear, then, why the high priests and the Sanhedrim and the people remained outside in the piazza and took care not to enter the palace of Herod, that is, the prætorium, because it was now the habitation of an infidel governor named Pilate. Meditating upon this St. Augustine cries out: "O hypocrites, who feared to make themselves unclean by entering the house of an infidel, but who thought little of the foulness of their own guilt!"

Pilate, already well informed of what had happened during the night, heard the tumult below in the piazza and understood that they were clamoring for his presence to institute proceedings against the Nazarene, the new Prophet. Like a true Roman, for the Romans never needlessly wounded the prejudices of their subject peoples, he yielded to Jewish custom and went out on the terrace.

Standing at the head of the stairs, he dominated the sit-

uation and was easily visible to all. He looked on coldly at the crowd below him, and, little by little, the tumult ceased. He saluted with a smile the legionaries who took their places around the piazza, for this was an assurance that the prestige of Rome would not be lowered with impunity. In a moment, he saw just at the foot of the stairs, in front of and apart from the crowd, the Man of Whom he had heard so much. Jesus stood there pale as death, but with the calm of perfect majesty.

About His neck was bound a chain, and this Pilate well knew to be the sign that the prisoner had been condemned to death. According to St. Jerome, the criminals guilty of such crimes as demanded the death sentence were brought before the final judge bound in chains. So the Roman Governor understood that the sentence had been already passed and they came before him only to demand its execution. He was keen enough, too, to see that all this gathering of the high priests and the Sanhedrim, coming before him in person with such solemnity and followed by a great crowd of noisy people, was intended to impress him with the necessity of his action. It was, in other words, an attempt to force his hand.

Pilate, pagan as he was, a follower of the philosophy then in vogue which doubted everything, had one only thought: to make his fortune and a successful political career. He was not without his good qualities and he read human nature fairly well. He knew of the terrible hatred of the high priests against the young Prophet of Nazareth, and he had plenty of reason to believe that it was through envy that they had now brought the Master before him.

(St. Matthew xxvii, 18.) Consequently he saw that their judgment was little to be relied upon as just.

Besides, he disliked this attempt to force his hand, and his pride, as a Roman, disdained the trick. Both his honor and the dignity of his position would not permit him to submit to such imposition. So, standing coldly in his place, he answered with a level tone and a cold voice the high priests clamoring for a sentence of death: "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" (St. John xviii, 29.) The Jews were thoroughly upset at this demand of Pilate. They answered him in evident resentment: "If He were not a malefactor we would not have brought Him here before you."

A malefactor! Thus they described Him, Who had so often been acclaimed by the crowd; Who had so often healed their sick and consoled them in sorrow; Who had always gone about doing good! Yes, it is He Who in this sad hour is presented to the Roman Governor as a common malefactor. And here St. Augustine, meditating upon this, says: "What a consolation to the followers and servants of Christ when they, too, are called by the same name!"

The Roman, always keen to the meaning of legal phrases, knew at once that the word "malefactor" was so generic as to express nothing of guilt and nothing of proof of guilt. As a Roman, too, he well knew that, according to the Roman law, unless the guilt was proved, the accused was set free. "Actore non probante reus absolvitur." No Roman Governor would dare to ignore or to violate that rule.

But compromise was not unknown to the Romans, and so, instead of dismissing the accused, which he should have done, he sought to free himself of the embarrassment and said to them: "Take Him you and judge Him according to your laws." (St. John XVIII, 31.)

By these words Pilate seemed to wish to indicate to the Jews that Jesus at least should not be condemned to death, for the Sanhedrim had no power of death in its hands; but this was only a weak evasion on the part of Pilate, and by leaving Christ in the hands of such fierce enemies he was really guilty of an injustice.

The high priests saw clearly the drift of Pilate's words, and since they had decreed His death they shouted back: "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death," again revealing in so many words what in reality was their final determination.

Surely for the heads of the Jewish nation to make this confession in the open piazza before the representative of Cæsar was a bitter trial, for in so doing they declared solemnly that the supreme power had passed from the Jews into the hands of the Romans. Oh, if only at that moment they had remembered the words of their own patriarch, Jacob, which they must have read again and again in their sacred books: "The sceptre shall not be taken away from Juda nor a ruler from his thigh, till he come, that is to be sent, and he shall be the expectation of nations." If they had but realized that in this open confession of the loss of their power they were indicating clearly that the Messias had come, what a terror would have invaded their souls!

But passion had wiped out all reason and all prophecy,

and their hatred for the Nazarene blinded them to the clear prediction of His coming. They wanted now but one thing, His death; yes, more than that, His death upon the cross, the most atrocious and humiliating form of death which could be devised; a sentence passed only upon slaves and on criminals guilty of the most enormous crimes. Thus they hoped at last to bury the very name of Jesus in scorn and mockery and to wipe forever from the minds of the Jewish people the reputation of the young Prophet who now stood before them.

His death they had decided upon and they had no intention of letting the Roman Governor escape with a mere compromise. He alone could give the sentence of death and they returned to the combat to compel him to do so. They saw that the mere general accusation of malefactor had no weight with Pilate, so instantly they began to make more specific accusations and of such a kind as would certainly make an impression upon the mind of a Roman Governor.

And so they cried: "We have found this Man perverting our nation and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar and saying that He is Christ, the King."

St. Chrysostom comments: "Here we see the keenest kind of astuteness and at the same time their utter bad faith. They had proclaimed Jesus guilty of death as a blasphemer because He called Himself the Son of God. They knew perfectly well that such an accusation would move Pilate very little; he was an idolater and pagan. Little he cared for what they considered blasphemy, and, for that matter, he would not be more moved by the ac-

cusation that the young Prophet had declared Himself the Son of God. Seeing Him there before him and judging Him according to his standard, this was merely foolish boasting, certainly not a crime worthy of death."

The cunning Pharisees quickly understood all this, so they changed the accusation to something quite different, to something which Pilate would understand very quickly. So Jesus was called a revolutionary, a seducer of the people, an objector to the payment of the Roman tax, an ambitious pretender to the throne. These were quite other things in the mind of any Roman, certainly in the mind of a Roman Governor, who had good reason to know how Tiberius, the Emperor, quick to suspect rebellion, punished it with ferocious severity.

For the moment Pilate hesitated. He gave little value to the first two accusations. Like a good Governor he was perfectly aware, through his various officials, of all that had transpired concerning Jesus during the last three years, yet never once had he heard that the young Prophet attempted any sort of revolution against Rome. Very likely he knew, also, the clever answer given by the Master to the Jews, when they asked Him whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar. These words, without doubt, had become rather celebrated and were passed, as a phrase like that was sure to pass, from mouth to mouth among the people.

He passed over the first two accusations lightly, but the last one evidently made its impression. This Man was a pretender to the throne! Ah! that was different! In that moment a crowd of memories passed before his mind. As

Governor of Palestine for several years, he knew very well the aspirations and the hopes of the Hebrew people; the coming of the three kings and the slaughter of the innocents were too recent incidents for him to ignore or to forget. In a way these events seemed to indicate that the long expected Messias was about to appear.

The preaching of John the Baptist and the three years of the public life of Jesus, with all His wonderful teachings, His beneficent works, and the miracles which He wrought among the people, — all these things Pilate had heard and well knew. He knew, also, the hatred with which the high priests persecuted this young Prophet of Nazareth, but now he remembered, too, that only a few days ago Jesus had entered the Holy City in glorious triumph, and into his mind came suddenly the thought: "Is this really the Messias?"

Throughout the whole Roman Empire there was a general sentiment quite well known that at this time the advent of some extraordinary, divine person would take place, and among the other popular sayings of the day was this: that out of the East, indeed out of Judea, would come the men who would rule the world. Tacitus speaks clearly of this rumor, so also Suetonius and Virgil. Surely Pilate could not be ignorant of these writings. He perhaps did not believe them; nevertheless, without doubt, they made some impression upon his mind.

It never occurred to him to imagine that all this referred to a moral and religious domination of the world. Pilate was a soldier, and to him the dominating power could be only that of a powerful monarch rivaling the

power of Cæsar. In this interpretation of the great popular sentiment Pilate, though a pagan, was of the same mind as the high priests of the Hebrews. Clearly it was his duty to suppress the very first indications of any rivalry to Cæsar's throne. Looking down to where Jesus stood before him in such complete abjection, he thought: "Can this be such a Man?" It seemed utterly impossible to give credence to the thought. Still in a matter of such grave responsibility it would be necessary to investigate and to examine the accused.

From the terrace where he was standing Pilate gave a sign to the officer on guard to lead Jesus into the prætorium, and entering himself he took his place in the tribunal as prescribed, and beside him sat his scribe or secretary to take cognizance of the defense which the Nazarene would establish.

Jesus stood before the Governor, and the vision of this scene compelled Origen to exclaim: "The Judge of all mankind stands as a guilty One before the judge of Judea." Pilate, seated in his place of judgment, looked long and attentively at the young Prophet standing before him, and he was profoundly struck by the ineffable dignity and calmness of His presence. Finally, breaking the silence, he said to Christ: "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" — thus clearly revealing what was passing in his mind. The Master answered this question of Pilate only by putting another one to him: "Sayest thou this thing of thyself or have others told it thee of Me?"

The obvious intention of this question of Pilate was to clear away all doubt in his mind as to the true position of

the Nazarene and His aspirations to royalty. The question of Christ irritated him evidently, for at once he said: "Am I a Jew? Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me. What hast Thou done?" The Roman Governor clearly was determined to keep himself free from all direct responsibility in this trial.

And yet his irritation at the question of Christ leads him into an illegality, for according to the law, he had no right to put the question which he did. The law does not compel a man to testify against himself in any case. But the Master, passing over this question, answered rather the first interrogation made by Pilate, whether He was King of the Jews. Oh! the sublime clearness and directness of His answer: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews." Again He repeats — surely Pilate can no longer misunderstand: "My kingdom is not from hence."

Let us examine for a moment these words of Christ. The Master did not deny that He was king. In fact He openly declared that He was the head of a kingdom, although a kingdom not depending upon human force of arms. His kingdom was of a character which constituted it above any earthly sovereignty. Pilate saw clearly the import of Christ's answer, and at once he said: "Art Thou a king?" To which Christ replied: "Thou sayest that I am a king." And then continued: "For this was I born and for this came I into the world that I should give

testimony to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice."

Who does not recall at once the words of Christ uttered long before: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"? I am the way which leads and the strength which assists to eternal life. Thus once more He turns the scales against those who had accused Him of pretending to earthly royalty.

Let us here reflect a moment upon the scene before us. Here is a Man accused, chained as a criminal, and delivered up as a malefactor, the rabble, clamoring for His death after they had offered to Him every sort of violence and cowardly maltreatment, His clothing torn, lacerated and defiled, the very picture of an outcast. And yet, Jesus, His head lifted in dignity before the great Roman Governor, stands in perfect calm, confronted by the power that the name of Rome signified, and in a tone of sublime royalty proclaims to the Roman Governor, to the supreme court of the Jewish nation, to the world, "I am King."

And such a King! Greater than any the world had ever seen before; King not only of the Jews, but of the Romans, of all the Gentiles and of all humanity, not then only but forevermore: King, Whose kingdom depended in no way upon mere human influence or human wealth or human power or the strength of arms, but upon the power of God alone — that omnipotent power of the Eternal Father Who had sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to found the Kingdom of Truth. He had come upon earth, and was now standing before the whole Jewish nation,

before all the power of Rome, before all the terrors and arms of the whole world, proclaiming that His kingdom had come to earth.

Oh! the sublimity of these words, the superhuman dignity with which they were pronounced, the divine consciousness of their meaning, that from that moment until the end of time the kingdom He was founding would endure, and that not all the powers of Hell could destroy it. The kingdom of the Son of God is indestructible and eternal, because God shall reign forever and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.

The last words of Christ struck deeply into the mind of the Governor: "Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice." The face of Pilate grew even more serious and thoughtful: "Everyone that is of the truth. — Where and who are they?" Pilate asked himself. He had been educated at Rome in the religion of Rome, that is to say, in the cult of many gods. Coming as Governor to Palestine, he had lived several years among a people who worshiped one God.

Doubtless, this new experience had influenced his mind, but, like the Roman of his day and like so many people of our own time, he had never taken the pains or the time to go very deeply into the question. Like most pagans of his day and ours he was wholly indifferent to religion. In fact, the confusion of many gods left him, as it had left so many of his time, simply skeptical. One philosopher said this, another said that. Who was to judge between them? These people about him believed in one God, but many of the great Roman and Grecian philosophers seemed not to

know exactly whether there was one God or several or any. So, like the easy-going Roman of his day, he put aside this whole question and did not occupy himself with speculative considerations of religion, but spent his days in seeking favor with Cæsar, governing his province as best he could, enjoying life as he found it.

Before him stood this young Prophet Who, in part obscurely and in part clearly, indicated that there was such a thing as the Kingdom of Truth, and that of this kingdom He, the Nazarene, was King. And the Roman skeptic, hearing the words of Christ, was moved with a slight curiosity to learn more of what this strange young Man taught about these speculative matters, and so he turned and, peering inquisitively into the face of Christ, he asked: "Truth, what is truth?"

Whatever might be the answer, it was clear at least in the mind of Pilate that the pretensions, or whatever they might be, on the part of this Rabbi, certainly had nothing to do with interfering with the Roman government or with the Empire of Cæsar. It was certainly clear that, as this Prophet said, if His kingdom was of an earthly kind His followers would have fought for it; and now this Prophet, calling Himself King, is clearly talking about a royalty which does not concern him as Governor. Neither would it disturb the peace and tranquillity of Cæsar. Clearly, then, this was no case in which he was interested as Governor, and, rising in his place and turning towards the Master, he said, in accents which showed clearly his own dubiousness: "What is truth?" And then, without waiting for an answer, in fact, doubting if any answer

could be given to his question other than the thousand various ones which he had heard already, he made up his mind that there was nothing more to concern him in the matter. So, going out once more and standing at the head of the stairs, looking down at the multitude still murmuring below, he said to them: "I find no cause in Him." That is, "your accusations against this Man have absolutely no ground. I have examined the case and it is clear to me that this Man is innocent."

Virtually this declaration meant that Jesus should be set free. The Roman Governor, having examined attentively the whole case, had made his decision. Jesus was innocent.

The Sanhedrim was stupefied at the publication of this sentence by the Roman Governor. What? Had all their machinations come to naught so quickly? The sight of the Nazarene standing side by side with Pilate on the terrace above them, thus practically set free by the Roman law, infuriated them even more than ever. Once more they shouted in rage their accusations, they filled the air with their cries, they threatened the Roman Governor for his conduct, they behaved as men obsessed by the powers of evil.

Pilate began to waver at this menacing spectacle and, turning to the Master, still perfectly calm at his side, he said to Him: "Hearest Thou not the things they say against Thee? Answereth Thou nothing?" But Jesus opened not His mouth; neither did He speak a single word. Pilate looked at Him in amazement. "Ita ut miraretur praeses vehementer." (St. Matthew XXVII, 14.)

Suddenly someone in the crowd shouted: "This Man has gone about among the people teaching them to rebel. He has disturbed by His teaching all Judea beginning from Galilee to this place." Pilate caught the word Galilee above the rumors of the crowd and instantly he saw a way out of his difficulty. This young Prophet, therefore, was a Galilean. Very well, then, let Him go before the Governor of Galilee to be tried. Pilate, knowing well that at that moment Herod, the Governor of Galilee, was in the city for the solemnity of the Passover, suddenly saw in the presence of Herod an escape for himself out of the difficulty.

The members of the Sanhedrim, hearing the clever response of Pilate to their demands, at once saw the purpose of the Roman Governor, and were intensely displeased. It suited not their purposes at all, this evasion on the part of Pilate. They had little respect for the Governor of Galilee, and, besides, it was not to their liking to be brushed aside in this way by the Roman authorities, especially as now it had been declared that Jesus was innocent, at least that the evidence against Him had proved nothing.

On the other hand, what was there to do? Certainly they had no power to impose their will upon the Roman Governor. Pilate saw clearly that the young Prophet was the victim of the envy and the hatred of the princes of the priests. He had some conscience left, and in any event, as a Roman official, he had a fairly good sense of justice. He really wanted to liberate Him entirely.

At the same time, he was shrewdly afraid of this howling mob and, to gain time and shift his responsibility,

there occurred to him this clever expedient of sending the Nazarene to be tried by Herod. Besides, it suddenly occurred to him that in this way he would not only free himself from embarrassment, but that he would gain favor with Herod, with whom sometime ago he had broken.

Clearly Pilate was something of a diplomat. He probably was not a bad man, but, like most men of his kind, he was an opportunist. Now, Pilate knew well that in sending Jesus to the tribunal of Herod he was acting entirely according to the Roman law, by which the accused may be sent from the place of arrest to be tried in the place of domicile. So the Sanhedrim had to bow its head and accept the terms. The Master, still bound, descended the steps, and once more in the midst of this howling mob He was hurried towards the house of Herod.

Can we not see the Roman Governor standing still upon the terrace, a look of perplexity upon his countenance, as he followed with his eyes the sad cortège which slowly disappeared from his view? What thoughts must have filled his mind, utterly confused by what to him appeared such apparent contradictions in the whole scene that had just taken place before him. The rage of the rabble disgusted him. The sight of that calm, royal figure, royal in its dignity even in the midst of humiliations, still stood out with wonderful clearness before his mental vision. The King of the Kingdom of Truth, — what did it all mean?

As the murmurs of the crowd gradually died out and the mob, little by little, was lost to view, with a deep sigh

he turned from the terrace and entered the house. Somehow the vision haunted him still and he could not dissipate from his mind a certain feeling of sadness which took possession of his soul. "Ah, truth. What is truth?" So he ruminated as he went back to the work of his office.

CHAPTER VIII

JUDAS

While all this was happening at the prætorium, elsewhere something quite different, something horrible was taking place.

Judas, knowing that the Master had been condemned at the first trial during the night, and that the sentence of death had been confirmed by the Sanhedrim early in the morning, and having witnessed the terrible humiliation of Jesus in the midst of every sort of cruel treatment and ignominy, finally saw Him dragged off, up the streets, taken to the house of the Roman Governor to have the sentence of death executed according to the Roman law.

At first he was utterly stunned. Surely, surely, he had never foreseen that such things, such awful and horrible things, should be the result of his action in betraying Christ. And now, at last, he began to realize the terrible magnitude, the full consequences of his awful crime. It is what always happens in such events. The human passions urge and drive relentlessly towards the sin, exciting the sinner to commit the crime, offering plausible excuses for its committal; but the deed once done, the sinful thing once accomplished, the passions subside, and then the guilty man is left to face Reason, his accuser, and Reason spares him nothing.

She holds up to him in cold resentment all the meanness of his action. Shame follows upon guilt and the

consciousness of a crime committed. Woe to the man who then delivers himself to despair! Woe to him who, in the midst of his remorse, does not lift his eyes to Heaven, always ready with its help to release him by penitence and sorrow from the slavery and the utter destruction of an unfettered remorse.

Judas, son of Simon of the little village of Kerioth in Judea (hence Iscariot), having met the Master the first year of His public life, at once attached himself to Him and became an enthusiastic follower of the Nazarene. Evidently he was a man of great activity and gave evidence of interesting himself deeply in all the affairs of the Master and His little flock. He seems to have been able to manage things, as we say to-day. He was a good administrator, and, as the little group who followed Christ had everything in common, it was naturally convenient that one of them should hold the purse and pay the bills, such little bills as there would be for such utter simplicity of life as theirs.

In any event he was always with the Master. He was rather an important person among this little group of disciples. He was chosen as one of the twelve. He had seen with his own eyes the wonderful works which Jesus performed day after day. He witnessed the healing of the sick, the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the calming of the tempest on the lake; he had seen the dead Lazarus raised to life at a word from the Master. He had heard the confession of Peter proclaiming the Divinity of Christ, and in company with the other Apostles he, too, had baptized and had preached the

doctrine of the New Law, and, like the other Apostles, he had seen that even the demons acknowledged the divine power of the Name of Christ.

Certainly he, with the other Apostles, had once believed, as Peter had exclaimed, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Surely, being in the company of his Master every day, he must have loved and venerated Him, as everyone did who saw Him and beheld the sweetness of His countenance and the tenderness of His heart. Judas surely, at least in the beginning, must have been sincere. But alas! how different was the end of all this for him!

What devilish power is it that money seems always to exercise upon the souls of men? One thing is certain; that is, that even a year before this time of the Passion of Our Lord Judas was already making his own selfish plans and following his own selfish desires. When in Capharnaum Jesus gave forth His promise of the Eucharist, He saw that some of His followers began to murmur and go apart from Him, saying: "This saying is hard and who can hear it?" But Jesus, turning to the Apostles, said: "Will you also go away?" Oh, the sadness of that voice! He promises them the greatest gift He can give them and He has difficulty in making them understand that it is God's gift, above human understanding. And at once, even after all they had seen, their faith began to weaken. "Will you go, too?" He asked the Apostles who stood nearest to Him.

Peter answered: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. We have believed and

have known that Thou are the Christ, the Son of God." Here was Peter's solemn declaration of his faith in Christ as God, and with him ten others believed and attested their faith, but not Judas. Judas was silent then. And St. John records Christ's words: "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?" The Evangelist goes on to say that Jesus made allusion to Judas, that He said this of Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray Him.

One may well wonder, how it is possible that Judas, beginning so well, ended in ruin. First, let us remember that no one immediately and all at once becomes thoroughly bad. He begins by venturing a little, by wandering small distances from the truth and from the straight line of honest action. Little by little he becomes accustomed to thus relaxing from the law, and then the habit becomes easy. Once that step is reached, things grow from bad to worse, until finally the catastrophe happens.

Judas was the bursar of the Apostles. He held the money, and there is something diabolical in money unless one is well on guard. Judas began, little by little, to feel that the money was his; and so his mind, step by step, formed the habit of thinking, not that he was the agent of the Apostles in dispensing the few funds they had, but that he was the real owner.

St. John describes the beginning of this process (XII, 6): "He was a thief, and, having the purse, carried the things that were put therein." So, little by little, Judas became accustomed to the habit of theft and the awful serpent of greed grew in his soul. His very nearness to

Grace itself seemed only to serve to harden his heart, and his eyes, which should have seen the way to Paradise, looked only towards the shadowy path of avarice and vice.

He heard the wonderful words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, but they fell upon his soul like the seed on stony soil. He once saw clearly, as the others saw, that his Master was God Himself, but his greed for money clouded his vision little by little, and his avarice for the things of this world gradually blinded him entirely to every spiritual beauty. First doubt came and then blank infidelity.

He still was compelled, even as the very enemies of Christ were compelled, to admit the sanctity, the holiness of the Master; but those whose god is money grow, little by little, to be persuaded that the holiness which impedes the enjoyment of the things which money can buy is rather a stupid thing. And so Judas turned, little by little, from the vision of God to the adoration of mere pelf.

It may be — in fact it is not at all improbable — that Judas, even for a moment, at least, at different times, admitted to himself that perhaps the Master was the Messias; but, as his faith became dulled and dimmed by his avarice, even his conception of the Messias changed with the change in his soul, and so he finally came to the general rabbinical point of view that the Messias was a temporal ruler, a wielder of temporal power, and the dispenser of wealth and riches. This point of view naturally allured him, for would he not then be one of those

who stood at the side of the great ruler? Would he not be one of the powers behind the throne?

Then, too, he had seen how the crowd, moved to a tremendous enthusiasm by the words which Christ uttered, wanted to seize Him and make Him king; and when Jesus, seeing their designs, fled from them and hid Himself so that they could not find Him, Judas felt only the sting of a severe disappointment. Once again, on the Feast of the Palms, when Christ entered Jerusalem in triumph, the hopes of Judas arose, but again rank disappointment followed when that very evening the Master, instead of pressing His advantage, led His Apostles away in silence and went from the Holy City to Bethany, evidently thus resigning all hope of any temporal prestige among the people.

Little by little, it dawned upon him that the whole adventure upon which he had entered with such enthusiasm was to end in complete disillusion. It was rather a life of privation and sacrifice, this companionship with the Master. There was little to it at times; there were the hardships of the weather and the long journeys, with the trial and fatigue at the end of them. What was there in all this for him? The Master and the disciples had to be content with shabby garments and poor food and the company of the ignorant, whereas, look at the Sanhedrim! How different things were with them! How wonderful was their raiment of office and what power and prestige they possessed! Ah, he had made a blunder, that was all! He was tired of this roving life with nothing in it but discomfort, and his venal soul began to make

plans so that he might enter into friendly relations with the members of the Sanhedrim.

All this was the outcome of the passion of greed and avarice which had beset his soul and had conquered. But not alone avarice was beginning to exercise complete domination over him. The spirit of rebellion was being urged on by another vice not less strong — the vice of a fierce jealousy. We see in the description given by the Evangelists the rather childish contention which went on from time to time among these rather ingenuous disciples of the Master.

Yes, they loved Him dearly, that is sure, but their very love for Him seemed to have made them envious, one of the other, so that they vied with each other as to which of them should be the greater among them. Clearly Jesus had indicated His will with regard to one of them. Peter He designated as the future head of His Church, and, having accepted that, they still had their little contests among themselves as to which of them might come after Peter in importance and prestige.

All this is perfectly intelligible. No doubt to Our Blessed Lord it seemed rather childish, but He was always patient with the little offenses of those who otherwise were so faithful to Him.

Not so with Judas. There was no ingenuousness in his heart; it was now all guile and deceit and ambition. Did he not hold the purse? Was he not the moneyed man of the little company of Apostles? No doubt, for a long time he had been a thorn in the side of the faithful disciples, who only wanted to be near the Master and who had

given up everything to follow Him. For this reason, no doubt, the little group understood well the meaning of Christ's words when He said: "One of you is a devil," that is, tempter.

Finally, came the last straw which served to break down whatever little there was left of decency in the heart of Judas. It was the evening of the 13th Nisan — that is, two days before the Passover — when Christ, leaving Jerusalem, went over to Bethany and there dined with His Apostles in the house of Simon, the leper whom the Master had cleansed some time before. His friends were there about Him at the table. Martha went about serving the meal, and the risen Lazarus reclined with others at the table.

Of a sudden a strange woman entered the banquet hall. A look of surprise lit up the faces of the guests. They knew her well by reputation. How strange that at this moment, unbidden, she should enter the house where Christ was resting. Without a word the Magdalen went straight to the place where Jesus was and, kneeling at His feet, she broke open a vase of precious ointment, poured it over the sacred feet of the Master, bathing them at the same time with a torrent of tears, her frame shaken by her sobs; and, loosing from about her head her wonderful hair, she stooped down to kiss those sacred feet and to wipe them with her thick golden locks.

The Divine Master gazed at her long in deep compassion. He understood well the full meaning of her action. His divine feet had brought to her, as to numberless others, a message such as no one else had ever brought.

The vanity of her hair vanished under the feet of Him who had brought her strength and salvation, and the thoughtless joy of life was turned into a bounding spring of love in her heart. There poured from her eyes a torrent of repentant tears.

Among the guests one could see first wonder and surprise, but the expression upon the face of Christ soon revealed to them all the complete understanding and the forgiveness of God. And so they watched, deeply moved yet silent, silent all; but not Judas. In all this he could see only one thing. To his avaricious eyes this was a mere waste of money. He could not even keep it to himself, but in his anger and disappointment he blurted out before the whole company: "Why all this waste? Why, this ointment could be sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor."

O hypocritical charity of Judas! Much he cared for the poor! That was the merest excuse to get for himself the money for which the vase of ointment might have been sold. To such an extreme the vileness of his own mind had led him! No thought of Jesus now, nor of all the love of which the ointment and the tears were but the symbols and the signs. But the Master, knowing well what was in the heart of Judas and the deep love and contrition in the heart of the Magdalen, rebuked the avarice of the one, and gave to posterity forever the fame of the deep love and repentance of the other.

The very tenderness of the Master towards the Magdalen served only the more to embitter the heart of this jealous and envious victim of avarice and ambition.

The rebuke of Judas was a public one. It served only to add anger and the spirit of revenge to all the other evil passions which now controlled him. Then and there he decided what to do.

St. Matthew tells us clearly. Judas went to the princes of the priests. He had lost the price of the vase of precious ointment. It must be made up in some way, and for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave, he sold his Master, the Christ, the Son of God.

So it came about that this man who began in faith ended in the vilest infamy. Little by little, he shut out from his eyes the light of grace, and more and more, he opened wide the door to the meanest and most despicable of passions: jealousy first, then avarice, then pride, then unbridled ambition. Step by step these vices grew in his soul until there was room for nothing else, not even for pity. And when at last anger and hatred were added to the list, they drove him headlong into the very abyss of vileness and treachery.

He not only was willing to forsake his Master; that, after all, one could understand. The presence of Holiness was to him only the bitterest kind of reproach. And so, if he had simply gone away from it all, one might say, alas! for the misery and the weakness of human nature. But the more elevated the position, the deeper the fall. From the high apostolate he reeled to the very bottom of meanness and disgrace. So he would not simply leave the Master, not merely betray Him, but he would sell Him! Jesus had often called him friend. Indeed, He would still do so even after His betrayal; but only a friend perverted

by utter meanness can be capable of the very depths of treachery. Generations before, the Prophets had foreseen this awful act, execrable beyond words, and the Master, reclining there at table, saw deep into the recesses of the heart of this false friend and knew full well the utter evil of which it now was capable.

Judas had seen how at another time the Master had made Himself invisible and had suddenly slipped out of the hands of His enemies, who threatened to stone Him, and oh, the horror of the thought! Instead of making him realize that this was a sign of His Divinity, it only served to increase his treachery, and so in the very act of selling his Master he warned the ministers of the Sanhedrim to take every precaution this time, so that the Master would have no chance of escape.

Step by step, always stealthily, he followed the crowd, after the arrest of Jesus, up the hill to the house of Annas and Caiphas, and finally along the road to the prætorium, where the Roman Governor was to sit in judgment. And now, as the horror of his crime began to reveal itself to his sinful soul, he almost hoped that the Master might even now slip away again from the hands and the bonds which constrained Him; but he saw that horror succeeded horror. Now he beheld Him, the sorry Victim of the fury of that crowd to which he had sold Him.

The sight of the awful spectacle made him almost insane. What had he done? Surely, surely, he had never imagined that these things would ever happen to Jesus. Suddenly a tremendous weakness, like the sickness of death, overcame him. He heard the rabble saying to

one another: "Who was it that betrayed the Prophet? Is it true that that wretch sold Him for thirty pieces of silver? A crime like that is the meanest thing possible for a man to do. He deserves to be stoned." He could stand no longer this chattering of the mob, and as the procession with the Master in the midst was just now passing at the foot of Mount Moria and it was the time of the early morning sacrifice, which took place in the temple at sunrise, suddenly the thought came to him: "I must undo all this. I can no longer bear the horror of this remorse. I will take back the money and break the contract."

With these thoughts surging in his mind, he rushed up the side of the hill to the temple and suddenly appeared before the ministers, already gathered in the Hieron. Appearing like one who has suddenly gone mad, with his hair disheveled, his body bent, and his eyes starting from their sockets, he yelled at them in a hoarse voice which betrayed the anguish of his stricken soul: "I have sinned! I have sinned! I have betrayed the blood of the Innocent!"

The ministers of the temple looked at him in amazement. Changed as he was, they still recognized him as the one who had sold Jesus. "I have sinned!" again he yelled. "Take back the money, the price of innocent blood! Take it back and release Him, for He is innocent, He is innocent!" Coldly the priests of the temple turned their backs upon him. They were tired of his ravings already, and it was time to go on with the morning sacrifice. "What is all this to us?" they answered over their

shoulders. "We have nothing more to do with it. You sold Him. Now it is your affair." "Quid ad nos? Tu videris." (St. Matthew xxvii, 4.) "This is no place for you now. Why do you come to bother us with your ravings? You made the contract and it stands. Now go!"

At these words an unbridled fury seized upon Judas, and taking from the bag, which had once served as the purse of the friends of Christ, the thirty pieces of silver, he threw them violently upon the pavement of the temple. Then, with a cry of rage upon his lips, he ran out of doors; he crept down the valley along the wall of the temple, down, down, until he came to the brook Cedron.

He knew not whither his steps were carrying him, but suddenly he halted as before him arose the garden of Gethsemane. There he stood at the very entrance, the very spot upon which he had given to the Son of Man the traitor's kiss. In his ears rang the cry of old, when brother had first murdered brother: Cain, where is thy brother, Abel? Alas! what hast thou done, for his blood now cries to Heaven for vengeance! The blood of the Master cries to Me, His Eternal Father. His death is upon thy head.

Meanwhile the sun was climbing through the deep blue of that Oriental sky, the sky of azure, so limpid and radiant in the early morning of that spring-time; but in the heart of Judas there was only the blackness of despair. The sight of the spot where he stood made him writhe in torture, and he fled onward and onward, not knowing where he was going. Still the voices rang in his

brain, the voices of the crowd, of the cruel rabble about Jesus, and those other voices which came, not from the rabble, but from Hell itself: "So this is the end to which you have come. How, wretched man, can you dare to live another hour? There is only one thing for you to do. Life henceforth would be an intolerable burden. Go now and finish it all."

Meanwhile, with what strength was left in his weakening limbs, he still hurried on, until finally he came to the little village of Siloam in a bleak and desolate place. Lifting his eyes from the earth for a moment, he caught sight of a tree by the wayside. Every last vestige of hope had vanished. The knotted branches of the tree seemed to beckon him towards them. For a moment he stood still, and instantly the decision flashed to his brain. He took from around his waist the girdle which fastened his clothing, and with it he strangled himself on the branches of the outspreading tree. Despair had closed the gates of his wretched soul even to the pardon of God.

"Suspensus crepuit medius et diffusa sunt omnia viscera ejus." Thus Nature showed her horror at his crime. His very bowels burst from his body and fell down over the earth at his feet. St. Peter recalls this fact to the faithful gathered in the Cenacle, after the Resurrection, as a thing well known to all Jerusalem.

The ministers of the temple of Jerusalem, once rid of the sight of Judas, turned their attention to the pieces of silver now scattered over the pavement, and they began to discuss what use they might be put to. It was clear they could not put them in the sacred treasury, because

they were the price of blood; so they agreed that with them they would purchase a place of burial for strangers. And that bit of ground has been known from that day to this as "The Field of Blood"— Haceldama. And so was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremias, saying: "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was prized, . . . and they gave them unto the potter's field . . . " (St. Matthew XXVII, 9.)

Meditating upon this hypocrisy of the ministers of the temple, St. Jerome says: "Oh, ye hypocrites, who strain at a gnat, but who swallow a camel! If this money could not be put in the treasury of the temple because it was the price of blood, why, then, did you shed that blood?" In their blindness they could not see that unwittingly they were carrying out the predictions of the holy prophets and thus fulfilling the eternal plans of God.

The perfect innocence of Christ was manifest to anyone willing to look the facts in the face, and now we have a public testimony to this innocence of the Master, coming, indeed, from a very different source. While the Roman Governor was solemnly proclaiming to the Sanhedrim and the rabble before the prætorium that he found no cause in this Man, within the temple itself another voice, the voice of the traitor himself, was loudly protesting to the high priests the same truth: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!" Thus in the temple of the Lord and in the temple of human justice at about the same time these two entirely different witnesses proclaimed to the Jewish nation and the Gentile world the absolute innocence of the Divine Master.

How wonderful are the ways of God, which, out of the very willfulness of man, produce good results, which, still leaving to man perfect freedom of will, turn everything finally to the completion of His supreme design! The Field of Blood would be forever the possession of the traitor Judas, since it was bought with his money, the price of his awful treachery; and through all the ages it will also be public proof of the innocence of Christ, and the name, Haceldama, will signify until the end of time the infamy of the one and the divine innocence of the Other.

And so ends, by the dreadful crime of suicide, the mortal life of him who had betrayed the Master. And his soul — what became of that? Alas! that is too clearly indicated by the words of Christ: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed! It were better for him if that man had not been born." Crazed by the thought of his crime, overwhelmed with horror at the sight of his awful deeds, not alone of the betrayal, but of all the crimes he had been committing for some time past, his soul was seized with such a terror that in it only despair could find place. His suicide is clear evidence that all hope had fled, and that the doors of his soul had been closed to all thought of sorrow and repentance.

Pride and stubbornness guarded these doors, and the tender mercy of Christ, which he had seen so often manifested again and again towards sinners, could find no entrance. His last crime of final impenitence was the greatest and the worst of all; and that soul of Judas, destined for eternal happiness, was now by this final act of black despair hurled into the abyss of Hell.

Here we may well reflect upon the contrast between the fate of Judas and that of Peter. Peter, too, had sinned enormously in denying, even with an oath, his Divine Master. He had heard the clear admonition of Jesus, yet, presuming upon his own strength, he rashly exposed himself to the danger and fell, fell repeatedly and most grievously. But it was a fall due rather to human weakness than to malice, and one gentle look from the eyes of his Master was sufficient to make him understand the baseness of his sin. Clearly Peter, though impulsive, was not bound by the obstinacy of pride, and, realizing quickly the horror of his sin, he at once arose, ran away from the occasion of it, fled to the solitude of a cave, and there poured out his whole soul in the bitterness of his tears.

Yes, the stain of his denial had left a black trace upon his soul, but his perfect sorrow and self-humiliation, finding vent in a torrent of weeping, would by the mercy of Christ wipe that trace away. Tradition says that from that hour his weeping never ceased, and that the tears, falling over his cheeks, wore a furrow, which was a witness to his deep contrition. Peter, too, was overwhelmed with remorse, but it was the sorrow of a son who had wounded his Father, a sorrow which hopes, confides, loves; such sorrow as never fails to touch the mercy of God. Peter never abandoned himself to despair, even in the midst of an awful grief, but, the first spasm of his suffering over, he summoned all the forces of his soul, determined to repair, as best he might, the evil he had done.

In the strength of God he arose a new man and went out again to find the Master, broken with sorrow, it is true, but determined never again to be guilty. And Jesus, Who had always shown a predilection for every poor sinner who would return to God, soon gave him proof of his complete pardon. Not only that, but He gave him the greatest sign of His utmost confidence and made and established this converted sinner who had denied Him the Prince of His Apostles, the head of His Church universal.

Oh, what a touching thought! To Peter and to the Magdalen He appeared first after His glorious Resurrection. Could there possibly be more convincing and more touching evidence of Christ's wonderful love for converted sinners? Oh, what a wonderful lesson of divine patience and divine love! Only God really forgets and forgives. Why should one, therefore, ever dare to despair when, with this evidence before his eyes, he must realize that despair alone can close out the mercy and the pardon of God.

How different is the case of Judas! His fall is not merely that of human weakness. He sins with his eyes wide open, with malice and with obstinacy. In vain the Master again and again had warned him of the ruin which threatened him; in vain He called him by the tender title of Friend, even at the moment he betrayed Him with a kiss; in vain He knelt before him — the Son of God humiliating Himself thus before this wretched man — and washed his feet; in vain, too, all the offered graces of the first Eucharistic Feast. The pride and the

stubbornness and the greed of Judas had utterly hardened his heart to all affection and to all grace, and so with an insolence simply ineffable he turned his back upon all these tender advances of the Master, determined that nothing should turn him from the realization of his iniquitous plan. He, too, was free, like Peter, to return, but we see only too clearly how he abused this freedom of his will. It is true that he, too, towards the end, realized the horror of his crime, and the thought of it tore his soul with anguish. There can be no doubt of this, for his sudden appearance in the temple, his words of confession to the High Priest, the disdain with which he hurled the sinful price of innocent blood upon the pavement of the temple, are clear indications of a terrible remorse; but his remorse was accompanied with no sign of penance. It was the hopeless despair of pride, it was the disappointment of baseness, not the repentance of the prodigal who sincerely wishes to return to his Father.

Oh, if only, after returning the guilty money, instead of rushing down the valley away from the Master, he had turned in the other direction and had gone simply and penitently to meet Him, to throw himself at His feet and to acknowledge his awful guilt! But no, his pride carried him away farther and farther from the Fountain of grace and mercy.

God is infinitely patient, it is true, but one must never forget that He is also infinitely just, and that divine justice, too, urges its patent claims even to divine mercy. And Judas himself, in the obstinacy of his sin, set the limit of divine justice as he cried out with Cain: "My sin

is too great to ever hope for pardon." It was Judas, himself, who, enfolded by infinite mercy, turned from it and demanded the sentence of infinite justice; and in his utter despair, defying God's willingness to pardon, he ended his mortal life in unpardonable crime and thus condemned his own soul to eternal punishment.

CHAPTER IX

JESUS BEFORE HEROD

PILATE, having now made up his mind to send Jesus to be tried by the Governor of Galilee, dispatched a messenger to explain to Herod the circumstances of the case. The Herod who at this time was the Governor of Galilee was Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. The first Herod, though a simple adventurer, had become by the favor of the Romans King of Jerusalem and of all Palestine. He was called "The Great" because he lost no time in filling the city and the whole country with grandiose monuments, by which, as usual, he succeeded in impressing the people with his power, but in reality he was only a great tyrant. He defiled his hands with the blood of one of the high priests merely to get him out of the way, seeing in him a possible rival. Not long after this he killed his own wife, Mariamne, his wife's mother, Alexandra, and condemned to strangulation both her sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, and he ended this miserable record of crime by the murder of the innocent children at the time of the birth of Christ.

As he was about to die, with the consent of Rome he divided his kingdom into four parts -- tetrarchies — assigning to the government of each one of them one of his four sons who survived him. The Tetrarchy of Judea, including the Holy City, was under the government of Archelaus, who very soon distinguished himself, like a

true son of his wretched father, by every form of iniquity, so that the Roman authorities were obliged to remove him finally, and, in his place, they sent a governor as ruler of the tetrarchy or province. At the time of Christ this Roman Governor was Pontius Pilate.

The Province of Galilee was governed by another son of the great Herod called Herod Antipas. This ruler had married the daughter of the King of Arabia, but soon tiring of her he fell in love with Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, and he ended by sending away his legitimate wife and taking his paramour into his house; and he dared all this in the face of the wrath of the King of Arabia and in spite of the Mosaic law, which condemned adultery with grave penalties.

But the Jewish priesthood had only the vestige of a shadow of power left. It had fallen low, and the only penalty which Antipas suffered was exclusion from the sacrifice in the temple.

Saint John the Baptist, alone, dared to denounce this adulterous king. Strong in the courage which God gives to His saints, he raised his voice against the scandalous life of this ruler, whose example was already having a ruinous effect upon the people, and it would seem that the King, notwithstanding these open reproaches on the part of the Baptist, nevertheless revered John and showed great deference to him and to his counsels.

But here was a clear contest. On the one side was the saintly Baptist with his fearless words of reproach, and on the other was the wicked passion of the King and the arts of a devilish woman. Before long it was clear that

the passion and the woman were the victors, and the woman, once sure of her position and her triumph, worked a horrible vengeance upon the saintly Baptist who had dared to stand in her way. Herodias and her wicked daughter, Salome, worked upon the mind of Herod until at last the Baptist was safe behind prison bars, and, not yet feeling secure, they determined that he should die. And so in the midst of a banquet given to celebrate Herod's natal day, Salome, leaving her place at the table, went before the King and performed her lascivious dances, and with her diabolical arts she mesmerized her mother's lover until passion, not reason, ruled him; and in the midst of his ravings, protesting his admiration for her, she suddenly made a request so abominable that evidently it was counseled by Satan himself: that the head of John the Baptist should be given to her on a dish.

Herod Antipas, with all the rottenness of his heart, was a man keen and shrewd of mind. He knew how to deceive the world, with a cunning, which the world often admires, absolutely unscrupulous. He understood men and he knew how to wait until the proper moment came. Jesus understood perfectly the character of this unworthy ruler, and He sums up His opinion of him in one word, "Fox!" "Go and tell that fox," He said on one occasion, "Behold I cast out devils, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am consummated. . . . It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." (St. Luke XIII, 32.) The Master had well taken the measure of the Tetrarch of Galilee, and we shall soon see with what precision that measure fitted him.

Coming up to Jerusalem for the Passover, Herod took up his lodging in a palace to the north of the Fortress Antonia, in that part of Jerusalem which was called the new city, Bethsaida, not far from the celebrated pool having five porticoes where Jesus had healed the paralytic some time before.

The messenger sent by Pilate was received with honor. He was immensely flattered that the Roman Governor should thus show such consideration of him. He was doubly glad on account of the snub thus administered to the Sanhedrim and the high priests, who had had the impertinence to exclude him from the sacrifice. And so he prepared himself, arraying himself in all his glory, to receive Jesus with every possible solemnity. Hurriedly the members of his court were summoned and also his guards who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem, composed mostly of Arabs and other barbarians. He had all the vanity of his father as well as his malice, and he set out to impress the Jews with his greatness and importance. At the same time there was something more than mere show in this gathering of the guards, for he knew well the feelings of the Sanhedrim towards him, and he had no intention of exposing himself, needlessly, to any hostile mood into which they might allow themselves to be betrayed. Seated in the midst of all these noble trappings, he folded his arms in silence and waited.

He had not long to wait. Already he heard the murmurings of the crowd, and soon the members of the Sanhedrim, leading the procession, entered. As the cries

of the rabble grew louder, he secretly congratulated himself that he had not forgotten to surround himself with his soldiers.

At last Jesus stood before him. Long and silently Herod gazed at the worn figure of the great Prophet of whom he had heard so much. For some time past he had heard of the wonders wrought by Christ and he was filled with a great curiosity to see Him with his own eyes, and now here He stands before him at last. What thoughts at that moment filled the mind of Herod! St. Luke describes them (XXIII, 8) thus: "Herod seeing Jesus was very glad; for he was desirous for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things of Him, and he hoped to see some sign wrought by Him."

In the meantime Annas and Caiphas approached him. They began in great haste to explain to the Tetrarch all the accusations made against the Master. In their hearts they despised Herod, but now they had their point to gain and they were all blandishments and obsequiousness. "True," they thought, "this Tetrarch is a poor sort of Jew, but still a Jew he is," and as a Jew they begged him to ratify the sentence of the Great Council. But Herod was shrewd. He heard all that Annas and Caiphas had to say, yet still silent he sat there pensive, while with half-closed eyes he peered curiously at the figure of the Master standing before him.

The sight in some mysterious way stirred him at the same time with pity and with repugnance. In that moment he thought of the miserable crime he had committed against John the Baptist. Not once but many

times that sacred head in the dish had arisen before his mind to torture him with remorse, and now here he was asked to put to death this Man, the Prophet, the Nazarene, of Whose goodness he had heard so much. Again, again, the head of the Baptist appeared before him. He heard the clamoring of the Sanhedrim about him demanding sentence. Well, why should he bother himself about the concerns of the Sanhedrim? They were certainly no friends of his. Besides, had not the Roman Governor sent word that he could find no cause for sentence in Jesus? Annas and Caiphas gabbled on with their accusations and their imprecations. Still Herod sat in silence, peering at the face of the Accused before him.

Christ remained silent. The fury of His accusers and the cool attitude of the judge moved Him not at all. He stood there imperturbable. He waited still in silence for Herod to begin the process. St. Luke says that Herod began to interrogate Him with many questions, talking to the Master at considerable length. The words of Herod the Evangelist does not give, but it is easy enough to fancy what they must have been: "The Roman Governor has sent you to me that I may judge you. You have heard all these accusations made here against you. What answer have you? I have heard many things to prove that you are extremely intelligent, in fact that you are very wise. Use your intelligence now and all the powers of your clever mind in rebuttal of all this testimony. What, still you remain silent? You utter no word in defense of yourself! I have heard, too, that you have done many wonderful things, many prodigies. Is

it true that you restored sight to the blind, that you raised Lazarus to life, that you fed a great multitude with a few little loaves? You see, I have the power to set you free! Why do you not answer me? Why not now perform one of your wonderful and mysterious deeds?"

Jesus still is silent. Irritated by the perfect calm of the Master, Herod still went on: "They tell me that the spirit of the Baptist, whom I beheaded, has come upon you. Is this true? Who are you? Why have you come? Who has sent you? What is the meaning of your words, your novel doctrine and your wonderful prodigies — if now you can say nothing and do nothing? One day many years ago three strange kings of the East came to my father's palace. They were seeking the newborn King of the Jews, Who, they said, had just been born in Judea. Were you that babe? How did you escape the death planned by my father? Where have you hidden yourself ever since until a few years ago? Silence still? Oh, come, tell me, are you really the Messias? To tell you the truth, you have no appearance of royalty about you. Still, tell me, tell me, what are you? Why have you come? What is your purpose? Come, come, defend yourself!"

In vain. Still Jesus stood there and spoke not a word. There was nothing provoking in His attitude, neither was there any sign of the suppliant. His sacred countenance gave no sign either of fear or pain, neither did it bear any sign of anger or of indifference. Clearly the thoughts of the Master were elsewhere, far, far from the scene in the midst of which He now stood. Looking calmly at the spot where Herod was seated before Him,

He saw beyond and behind Herod all the wickedness of his past life. He saw rising up before the King the terrible chastisements which he was calling down upon his own head. The tears flooded His eyes at the sight, but His sacred lips uttered no sound of defense for Himself, neither did they express an admonition to the heart of the King already stifled with sin.

Herod still waited for an answer, and, entirely misinterpreting the expression of Christ's countenance, or perhaps feeling that instead of judging he was being judged, he was suddenly stirred with a deep irritation. This man scarcely deigned to notice either his desire for a sign or a miracle, or his request for some show of defense. All about were the high priests and many of the important people of Jerusalem. They were keenly aware of the attitude of the Master towards Herod, thus increasing his unbearable embarrassment.

The high priests, noting the changing sentiment of Herod, urged him on to give sentence. Meanwhile the shrewdness and astuteness of the "Fox" did not desert this son of the great Herod. He began to reflect in this manner: "This Man here before me is accused of pretending to be the Messias, that is, the Great King, the Ruler of the World, so long expected. What an absurdity! Evidently, these pretensions on the part of the young Prophet prove clearly that He is a visionary more mad than guilty. Ah, this is the true key to the situation. I shall treat Him as a fool and send Him back to the Roman Governor without sentence of any kind."

The game on the part of Herod was certainly clever

enough. He would escape the dread of remorse and thus liberate himself from the embarrassment of a very serious situation. So over the sacred Body of the Man-God was thrown the white garment of the fool. It is true that this was a sign among the Jews that the bearer had lost his mind, was, in fact, the victim of hallucinations; but they forgot at that moment that it was also the symbol of imperial dignity; they forgot that it was the particular privilege of the kings of the Orient; they forgot, too, that it was the vestment of those who had been declared innocent before the tribunal. All these meanings for the moment were forgotten and one only, the public declaration of the folly of this man, was in their minds. St. Luke writes: "Herod with his army set Him at nought, and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment." (St. Luke XXIII, 11.)

The enemies of Christ were far from being satisfied. They still pestered Herod with their clamors for judgment. But the "Fox" could not be so easily trapped. Rising in his place, he ordered the soldiers immediately to conduct the accused Prophet out of his house and take Him back to Pilate.

The high priests and the Sanhedrim were by this time more furious than ever. This game of Pilate and Herod had gone on long enough and they determined to end it. Right and left, hither and thither, they sent their messengers to gather all the people before the palace of Pilate, by their appearance of anger and by their menacing threats to compel the Roman Governor at last to end this ridiculous pretense of doing them justice,

when in reality he was only evading the difficulty. They filled the ears of the mob now gathering in the streets with renewed accusations, with lies of every kind against the hated Prophet. The crowd grew larger and noisier and fiercer at every step as they marched again towards the house of Pilate. They did not return by the same way they had traversed in coming to the house of Herod. Instead, they took a longer route through the city, thus purposely to infuriate the more the gathering mob and to instill among the growing rabble all the hatred which they themselves felt towards Jesus. This time Pilate must act and he must be made to see that all the population were of one accord. Surely, he would never dare to deny this time what they had determined to insist upon at any cost, the sentence of death against the Master.

It is not out of place to consider here a thought which naturally has come to our minds in reviewing the scene thus described. To the interrogations of Annas and Caiphas as well as to those of Pilate, Christ gave an answer in such form as He desired. To Herod He answers not a word. We may be permitted to conjecture at least the reason of the Master's silence at the court of Herod. Some writers imagine this reason to be the fact that Herod had no jurisdiction over Jesus, but this can hardly be the real reason since that is also true of Annas, Caiphas, and Pilate. In fact, later in this sad story we shall see that Christ directly manifests this to Pilate in these words: "Thou wouldst have no power over Me unless it had been given to thee from above," indicating

the real source and origin of any power or jurisdiction whatsoever over the person of the Prophet.

Others conclude that the reason that Christ remained silent, in spite of every endeavor on the part of Herod to arouse Him to answer, was that this Herod had been excommunicated by the Sanhedrim and forbidden to appear in the temple at the time of the sacrifice, because of his life of adultery. It is true that the Synagogue had inflicted upon Herod the penalty called "niddui" — separation. Now, this penalty did not prohibit others to speak to the one thus punished; it only prescribed that no one should approach nearer than four cubits the person thus excommunicated. Therefore Our Blessed Lord, even yielding, as He did, proper deference to the Mosaic law, might have answered Herod without any breach of legal propriety.

As a matter of fact, we see in the description of the Evangelists that the high priests and the members of the Sanhedrim did converse with Herod concerning the accusations they had brought against the Master. With greater reason, therefore, Jesus might well have raised His voice in His own defense. So that no one of these reasons seems to solve the question.

But there was another reason which might well be the real one. Herod was an adulterer, living in open concubinage with Herodias. Besides this, he had put John the Baptist to death, moved to this awful crime by his passion for his paramour. Clearly he was a very low and base type of man, guilty of the most heinous crime. Certainly, it must have been most repugnant to the soul

of the all holy Son of God to hold intercourse with such a wretch. Still, Christ had shown His tender mercy, even the tenderest compassion, towards sinners. Why, then, silence in this case? Without doubt it was because Christ saw in the sinful soul of Herod not merely sin but the stubbornness of impenitence. While that perversity was evident Christ would make no advances. It was not through any desire on the part of Herod to obtain the pardon of God through the Prophet that he had desired so much to see Him. It was a whim of vulgar curiosity. Not only was Herod's heart filled with base passion, but his character was that of a fox, shrewd, cunning and calculating. There was nothing of impulse that might possibly have excused his deeds. It was just from pure selfishness and cruel cold-heartedness, that the intolerable vanity of the man and his insatiable curiosity arose to the surface on this occasion.

He was anxious to see the Prophet perform a miracle. Even this was merely a vulgar craving for some new emotion, some new thrill, not certainly from any desire of real proof of Christ's Divinity. The Master read his soul through and through. From its blackness no ray either of penitence or of sorrow or of the desire to amend shone out. One tender glance had moved Peter to the depth of his soul. No kindly look, no meek word would have penetrated the stubbornness, the selfishness and the vanity of this man. And so the Master, standing before him, seemed to gaze not at him but through him, and no word passed His lips.

Still, even by His very silence Christ offered to Herod

the favor of His grace. Surely Antipas must have had profound cause for reflection in beholding the Master thus immovable before him. He had heard of the prodigies wrought by Jesus. No doubt he must have thought: "There is something of the divine in this young Prophet." Indeed, St. Matthew tells us that he had the false idea that the spirit of the Baptist, whom he had killed, had entered this remarkable Rabbi. Consequently, it would be but natural that the Tetrarch should feel that the silence of the Master was in reality the keenest rebuke for the wickedness of his life, and in this way, we repeat, by His very silence, Christ was offering grace to Herod, with what sad results we know. Instead of softening his heart, it only served to harden him the more. The silent rebuke of the Master irritated him profoundly, and his answer to Christ's silent invitation to amendment was only added outrage in publicly branding Jesus as a fool.

And thus Wisdom itself, and Sanctity itself, was proclaimed a fool before the world by a most impious sinner. He Who had wrought such prodigies as the world had never seen before; He from Whose lips came forth the wonderful discourse of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount; He Who spoke (as His enemies were forced to confess) as no man ever had spoken; the Eternal Word, the incarnate Wisdom of God, was labeled by a prince, guilty of the most monstrous crimes, as one demented, a visionary, a lunatic. He was not to be condemned to death, merely because He was crazy; not guilty of crime, only because He was bereft of intelligence.

Oh, cruel and false judgment of the world, what a

mockery of justice is all this! Well did St. Paul, doubtless with this scene in his mind, exclaim: "The foolish things of the world has God chosen to confound the wise!"

Oh, the infinite patience of Jesus, Who bears so meekly such intolerable humiliations, even from those most unworthy! Not a word of complaint escapes His lips, and in silence, oh, such noble silence, He bears it all uncomplainingly.

What a lesson to us with our silly personal pride, so sensitive to every slightest imaginary offense, so quick to resent the slightest suspicion of an affront and so slow to pardon the least word of fancied insult! The golden silence of Christ is a rebuke, not only to Herod, but to all of us who, unlike the Master, are all too ready to resent everything which displeases us.

CHAPTER X

ONCE MORE THE PRÆTORIUM

The Confirmation of the Innocence of Jesus

Once Herod had decided to send the Master back to Pilate, he dispatched messengers to the prætorium to tell the Roman Governor that the Tetrarch appreciated the compliment paid him by Pilate, and that he, in turn, agreed entirely with the decision of the Roman Governor. These were, of course, pretty compliments between these two men who hitherto had been rather unfriendly to each other. St. Luke tells us that upon that day they became friends. (St. Luke xxiii, 12.) The very presence of Christ had at least brought one good result. The declaration of His innocence made by both judges brought in its train the grace of mutual friendship and reconciliation.

Meanwhile, in the Lithostrotos, the square beneath the prætorium, gathered a tremendous concourse of people, for now the whole city was aroused and the very air was quivering with excitement. On came the Sanhedrim again. The high priests and the Pharisees, the ministers of the temple, the rabble and the crowd of curiosity-seekers, always ready, then, as now, to follow in the wake of any excitement, and aroused by the messengers of the leaders of the people, all set up a tremendous uproar and a fearful clamor for the purpose of making Pilate realize that they had come to the end of their patience.

At the time of the Passover in the preceding year, the Roman Governor found himself face to face with a conspiracy among the Galileans, and to put it down he was obliged to use force, and several had been killed in the skirmish. So, hearing the shouts of the rabble again in the forum in front of the palace, he gave orders to double the guard, and they formed a cordon of troops, shutting off the crowd from the principal entrance to the palace.

In coming up from Cæsarea, his usual place of residence, especially at the time of the Passover, he was always accompanied by a very strong body of soldiery, so that he felt fairly safe in believing that the dignity of the Roman authority would not suffer or be menaced with attack.

Without doubt the Holy Virgin, the Mother of Jesus, was somewhere there present. The Evangelists say nothing of her presence in this particular place, but we hold as most probable that she, who, later on, stood at the foot of the Cross on Calvary and was at her place by the sepulchre after the death of her Son, should be now somewhere near Jesus as He went from judge to judge in this sad procession. Indeed, we cannot imagine that the Blessed Virgin, eager to follow to the bitter end the footsteps of her beloved Son, should not with St. John and several of the pious women, her friends and the followers of Jesus, be there in some corner under the portico of the forum, looking on with sad eyes and tortured soul at all that was happening.

And so the dreadful scene is set before our eyes. At the foot of the royal staircase in front of all the others

stood Jesus alone. Just behind was a cordon of the soldiery. On either side were the members of the Sanhedrim and the high priests, and behind the soldiers an overwhelming crowd of the populace. Presently Pilate, coming forth from the palace, stands again upon the terrace above the royal stairway. With a motion of his hand he commanded silence and then signaled the priests and the magistrates of the people to come nearer that they might the more easily hear what he was about to say. "You have brought this Man before me," he began in rather an irritated tone, "as a usurper and a conspirator. I have interrogated Him in your presence and I found no cause of guilt in Him. I sent Him then to Herod and, behold! Herod sends Him back to me with a confirmation of my decision. Both Herod and I, therefore, agree that He has done nothing worthy of death, so I shall punish Him and then liberate Him." "Emendatum ergo illum dimittam." (St. Luke XXIII, 16.) It is clear that by this he meant the punishment of flagellation.

But surely here is the most outrageous lack of logic! He finds no cause in Him, but he will punish Him. By what right and according to what law, human or divine? We can gather at least that when the Master came back to the prætorium clothed with the distinctive habit of a fool, according to Herod's orders, this made a certain impression on the mind of Pilate. On the first occasion his sympathy was entirely with the Master, Whom he considered to be the victim of the jealousy of these fanatical Jews, especially of the Pharisees; but now he

sees before him a visionary, and the prestige of the Master was much diminished in the mind of the Roman Governor. "Well," thought Pilate, "although I have no intention of allowing these people to put Him to death, perhaps I can administer a lesson to Him and by punishment, not too severe, of course, arouse this visionary from His dream." Here, without doubt, Pilate failed grievously in his duty. Unquestionably, as the Roman Governor, he might have sent the crowd away, rebuked them for their fanaticism, and then delivered Jesus out of their hands. This is precisely what even a simple tribune did later for St. Paul. Surely the Roman Governor had far more power and far more authority than a mere tribune. This he should have done, and he could easily have done it. Instead he made of himself a sad exhibition of stupid weakness. He showed himself to be not a just judge, but a compromiser, a mere follower of expediency, and following a policy of opportunism, utterly unworthy of him and of his office, he sought at the same time to liberate Jesus and to conciliate the Jews.

The events proved that he failed in both plans, as is so often the case with mere compromise. As the high priests and the Sanhedrim heard the words of Pilate, they began to shake their heads and shrug their shoulders, to indicate that these half measures would satisfy them very little. As Jesus was led up the stairway by the soldiers to undergo the torture of flagellation, they went back among the crowd and redoubled their efforts to arouse the people to further aggression and violence.

Suddenly the Governor remembered that it was the

custom to liberate one of the prisoners at the request of the people during the Passover. The origin of this custom is not clear. The Talmud mentions it and Origen confirms it. Livy declares that the Romans themselves were accustomed at the time of certain festivals to free some of the prisoners. We have seen that the Roman authorities had deprived the Sanhedrim of the right of life and death, but as an act of condescension towards the Hebrew people now subject to Rome, the Roman law permitted the release of one under trial, as a part of the Hebraic ritual, commemorating the freeing of the Hebrews from slavery under the Egyptians. So, taking advantage of this privilege, Pilate, with the hope that they would allow Jesus to go free, said to the multitude below him in the piazza: "It is the custom with you to set a prisoner free at the time of the Passover. Which now will you liberate, Barabbas, the robber, or Jesus, Who is called Christ, King of the Jews?"

Here again is another outrage to Christ, for this Barabbas, who is now set side by side with the Master, is one of the worst criminals in the prison, one who had aroused the people to sedition and had been guilty of murder.

Mark the words of Pilate: "Which do you choose, Barabbas, or Jesus called the Christ, the King of the Jews?"

We see again and again that Pilate gives Our Blessed Lord openly and publicly this title of "King of the Jews." Was it a cynical sentiment which prompted him to throw this insult at the crowd of fanatics beneath him, calling this visionary their King, or was it, as Tertullian

says, that into the mind of Pilate there had already begun to creep a vague conviction of the true dignity of the Master? In any event there is no doubt that in presenting one of the worst criminals along side of this innocent visionary, he would force the Sanhedrim and the high priests to free the young Prophet; and, indeed, it could not occur to him that they would prefer to liberate the basest of criminals and to insist upon the condemnation of this meek victim of their wrath. But after all, again we see the Roman Governor following the path of compromise and expediency rather than of justice. What a humiliation for the Divine Redeemer of the world!

Leaving them for a moment to make up their mind on the subject of their choice, he went into the house and there a messenger from his wife came hurriedly towards him bearing this solemn message: "Have nothing to do with this just Man, for to-day in a vision I have been much disturbed on His account." (St. Matthew xxvii, 19.)

According to tradition, the wife of Pilate was called Claudia. Her name is recorded among the saints in the Grecian menology. And Cornelius a Lapide believes that she was the same Claudia named by St. Paul in his second letter to Timothy. Doubtless, though a Roman, she knew a good deal about the Jewish religion, and some writers have described her as a proselyte, that is, one who, though not yet of the Hebrew faith, still adhered somewhat to the Mosaic law.

However this may be, the fact is, that during the night

she had the grace to see in a vision the figure of the Divine Redeemer, and when the morning came, hearing the tumult of the crowd in the piazza below the palace, she looked out and saw the weary and blood-stained face of Christ. She realized instantly that some terrible thing was taking place, and that, doubtless, this Man Whom she had seen in her vision was the victim of a horrible tragedy. Hastily she called one of the attendants and, trembling with anxiety, she bade him go at once to warn her husband, the Roman Governor, of her vision, and to entreat him not to allow himself to become embroiled in this tragic plot, hatched by the Sanhedrim against Jesus.

Pilate again Protests in Favor of Jesus

The Roman Governor was deeply stirred by this message sent to him by his wife and a great wonder filled his soul. Meanwhile, the high priests and the leaders were outside inciting the people to demand Barabbas, and not Christ, as the one to be freed on the festival day.

Again Pilate returned to his place on the terrace and repeated: "Which, therefore, of these two do you wish that I should set free?" From all sides arose the shrill cry of the mob: "Not this Man, but Barabbas! Give us Barabbas! Away with this Man and give us Barabbas!"

Pilate stood stupefied at their rage and the infamy of their choice. He had hoped thus to be able to give Jesus His freedom while they worked their will on a robber and murderer. The sight of their frenzy utterly disgusted him, and yet he was too weak to take the path which lay

clearly before his eyes. Even while he looked and listened to their mad cries he might well have thought what St. Augustine so beautifully expresses: "Oh, the fury of these fanatics! They wished to kill Him Who raised the dead to life and to set him free who had killed others."

Indignant at such baseness, and still hoping almost against hope to compel them to set Jesus free, he cried out: "What shall I do then with Jesus that is called the Christ, the King of the Jews?" This time their frenzy had reached the limit, and they shouted up to Pilate, with voices full of rage: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Still Pilate stood his ground. He was wavering, but had not yet yielded, and for the third time he cried to them: "But what evil has this Man done? I find in Him no cause of death. I will chastise Him, therefore, and let Him go." (St. Luke XXIII, 22.)

The crowd rocked and swayed with wrath like so many madmen. It seemed as though Hell had let loose its venom and its fury. The high priests and the Pharisees threw their arms up in a menacing rage and they led the chorus of the mob to a higher pitch of frenzy. And then, and then, alas! Pilate's weakness grew and grew. The sight of this raging multitude began to have its effect upon his wavering mind, so he liberated Barabbas and sent Jesus to be flagellated.

The Flagellation

For certain grave faults, especially for those against the flesh, the Jewish law prescribed the flagellation, but this punishment should never exceed forty blows. This

penalty was usually inflicted in the synagogue by the ministers of the temple, and, though it was unpleasant enough, it was not usually cruel nor did it carry with it the mark of infamy. St. Paul himself, as he writes in his Epistle to the Corinthians, underwent this punishment. "Thrice," he says, "was I beaten with rods; five times did I receive forty stripes save one." (II Cor. xi, 24, 25.)

Among the Romans it was quite another thing. The Mosaic law had restrained this punishment within human bounds, but the pagan world knew no limits to its cruelty. This we see clearly in the authentic descriptions of the sufferings of the Martyrs. The pagans, both Greek and Roman, had, it is true, a very high degree of civilization, but its refinement was merely external and below the surface was the fiercest barbarism. Side by side with the cultivation of beautiful literature and fine arts were the grossest bestiality and the most heartless sort of cruelty.

The Roman law did not limit the number of blows. That was left entirely to the decision of the judge and often even to the whim of the soldiers who executed the sentence. No wonder, then, that we read from time to time that a prisoner subjected to the tortures of flagellation frequently died of the torment. Such a case Cicero records in the case of Cestus. In fact, even in fairly modern times this brutal form of punishment was used. The Russian knout and the British cat-o'-nine-tails are but relics of this savage form of punishment.

It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that the very thought of this penalty was enough to make one shudder;

and yet how many Martyrs, how many young Virgins of the faith were compelled to undergo it, rather than offer incense to the idols! It is a sad commentary on pagan civilization to think that the Roman matrons frequently thus punished their own slaves.

The ministers of the law who carried out this form of punishment were called lictors. When they accompanied the Prætor or the other great magistrates of imperial Rome, they carried, as a sign of their office, an axe surrounded by whips. It was rather an abject kind of office and generally held by men of little feeling or sensibility.

The place in which Jesus underwent this brutal punishment is fairly certain. The "Breviarius" of Jerusalem, written about the year 530, enumerates and describes accurately the various holy places of Jerusalem, and it mentions clearly the cell where Jesus was despoiled of His garments and scourged. During the period of Charlemagne, at the beginning of the ninth century, the author of the work called "Commemoratorium" assures us that the place of flagellation was still held by the Christians, although at that time the Mohammedans occupied the Holy City. In the twelfth century this cell was restored by the Crusaders. Again in 1618 it was destroyed by the Turks, but, two centuries later it was given back by Ibrahim Pasha to the Franciscans who guard it to this day.

It is situated a little to the east of the arch called Ecce Homo. This arch was no other than a part of the great gateway which led from the public street up to the fortress called Antonia, opening onto the great piazza called

the Lithostrotos. From all the evidence gathered from various writings as well as from recent excavations, we must conclude that this cell, in which Our Blessed Lord underwent the terrible torture of the flagellation, was at that part of the piazza opposite the great entrance, in a portico occupied by the guards of the fortress.

Hither, therefore, Jesus was led, while to satisfy the people the weak Governor liberated Barabbas, the thief and the murderer. St. Augustine, in attempting to explain in something of a kindly sense this action of Pilate, says: "He did it, not to persecute the Lord, but to placate the fury of the Jews, hoping that in this way he might soften their hearts and thus at least prevent His being put to death."

"Go, Lictor, bind the hands of the prisoner, veil his head and strike him with blows." Such were the words of the legal command of the Roman judge whenever he condemned a prisoner to this penalty. The hands were bound, the head covered so that the cries of the victim might not be heard, so terrible was the agony. And yet the Evangelists merely write: "He was scourged." They knew full well the horror of these words. The brevity of the statement of this torture shows that they dared not allow themselves any attempt to describe it. But many pious and saintly souls since that time have meditated upon these few words, and St. Bridget and Catherine Emmerich have left, as the fruit of their meditations, a description to make one tremble with horror.

The clothing of Christ was torn from His Body. Quickly He was bound to the column where, often before,

wretched malefactors had been whipped, and thus, the Son of God, to pay the penalty of the sins of man and to obtain for him God's mercy, underwent a humiliation and a penalty which no words can describe. Isaias, seeing in the vision of prophecy this very scene, exclaimed: "He was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed." (Isaias LIII, 5.) Well may we meditate upon these words of the prophet, but only when in Heaven all is revealed to us shall we understand the immeasurable profundity of the grief of Christ and the penalty of sin.

The dreadful scourging begins. Blow succeeds blow, inflicting wound after wound all over the Sacred Body of the Master. The flesh is lifted in horrid welts, the skin is broken by the lashes and the blood runs down over the shivering frame to the pavement below. It is the vision of the Prophets enacted, as it were, under our eyes: — "The whips have beaten Me and there is no sound spot in My body. I sought someone who would console Me and I found him not. I have become even as a worm and no man, the outcast of humanity and the castaway of the people." And Isaias, contemplating this dreadful scene, exclaimed in horror: "There is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness . . . despised, and the most abject of men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity. . . . Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted." (Isaias LIII, 2–4.) These words, it is true, apply to all the various

scenes of the Passion, but they are especially verified in the flagellation.

Our fancy almost refuses to picture the sight, so terrible, so horrible, so full of the vilest indignity. We close our ears at the sound of the whips descending upon that Sacred Body and we are overwhelmed, beholding the tender and gentle frame of the Master writhing under each terrible blow. We hear the sad groaning which, try as He will to stifle, still comes as a sweet lament from the bruised lips of our sweet Jesus. And this pitiful moan is but another prayer lifted to Heaven for His persecutors, even in the midst of barbarous cruelty.

At last the soldiers, utterly worn out by their efforts, cease the whipping. And here, according to the vision of many pious souls who have meditated all their lives upon the Passion, an incident happened, which at least we note, in passing. Moved at the sight of the sublime patience of Christ, one of the soldiers of the guard stepped out of the crowd and said: "Cease your cruelty! Enough and more than enough! Do you not see that you are killing this innocent Man? This is not chastisement. You are inflicting a death penalty. You have gone beyond your orders. Cease!" And cutting with his sword the ropes which had bound the Master to the column and, having thus spoken, he disappeared; while Jesus, overcome with utter weakness, fell upon the ground in the pool of His own blood.

Here one is prompted to ask: — What sort of a column was it to which Our Blessed Lord was bound? Was it a short upright piece of stone or was it one of the columns

supporting the roof of the cell? We know nothing certain about this. At Santa Prassede in Rome there is an upright piece of marble which looks like the base of a column. It was brought to Rome in 1223 by Cardinal Colonna, Legate of Pope Honorius III. It had been given to him in Jerusalem as the column to which the Lord was bound and was called the "Column of the Flagellation." Fleury asserts that it was, indeed, the authentic column. But we may still ask; Was it the whole column or only a part of it? Here again we cannot state with certainty the answer. Ignatius of Smolensk, who visited Constantinople and the Holy Places in 1390, speaks of a column of the Flagellation in the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople and another in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This latter one is still there in a niche and is jealously guarded by the Franciscans. It seems, therefore, altogether quite probable that the original column was a high marble pillar which afterwards, perhaps at the time of the destruction of the city, was broken into fragments so that these different pillars in Rome and in Jerusalem may be parts of the original column of the Flagellation.

The whole Passion of Christ was borne by Him for all our sins, but, as the penalty of flagellation was inflicted according to the law especially on those who had sinned carnally, we may well believe that Our Blessed Lord underwent this shameful and painful torture particularly for the redemption of all those who, by lust and impurities, had called down upon their souls the anger of God. We may all blush for shame that the pure and

innocent Son of God delivered Himself over to the soldiers to be beaten mercilessly by them. His Eternal Father, seeing His humiliation and the indignities heaped upon His Sacred Body, would thus be moved to compassion and to the forgiveness of all who, in thought, word, or deed, had yielded to the temptations of the flesh.

The Crowning with Thorns

The long night of agony which had passed, the buffetings and the scorn which He had undergone since His capture in the Garden, all these now had culminated in the terrible indignities and sufferings of the flagellation. He had lost great quantities of blood. The fever of an immense fatigue overwhelmed His body, livid with wounds and blows. He was overcome with an awful thirst, but no one was there to offer Him help or consolation. But it was not yet over. He must now appear again before the Governor. And so, as He was unable Himself to rise, they rudely lifted Him to His feet and threw over His wounded body His wretched clothing, now soiled with filth and blood. The voices of the rabble were still audible outside of the forum. They dared not approach the prætorium in that direction.

There was another entrance, by a narrower staircase, which opened from the porticoes where the guard kept vigil, and this led directly to the interior courtyard of the palace. This is the staircase which the Franciscans show to-day as the Scala Santa, and which is, therefore, quite a different set of stairs from that set at the principal entrance of the prætorium near the arch of the Ecce

Homo. Both these stairs Christ had trodden at different times during the sacred hours of His Passion. Both had kissed His sacred feet, both had received the drops of His most Precious Blood which fell from His sacred wounds, and both, therefore, surely merit the veneration shown them ever since.

The weakness which the Master now felt all over His body and the pain which He endured from the opened wounds made it impossible for Him to walk alone; and so we can see, in meditation, the rude soldiery half pushing, half dragging Him along the portico, and then, step by step, with agonizing torture, ascending the stairs into the palace. "Milites antem duxerunt eum in atrium pretorii." (St. Mark xv, 6.) While they were waiting in the atrium for the word of Pilate to bring Christ before him, the soldiers, heartless and cruel by nature and by profession, amused themselves by ribald jokes and wicked games, of which they made the butt Our Blessed Lord.

One of the accusations that one of these soldiers had heard formulated by the Sanhedrim was that He had called Himself a king. They knew, moreover, that Herod had just sent Him back to Pilate clothed as a fool. These thoughts suggested to their rude minds the game which they proceeded at once to play. Did not a king wear a royal crown and hold in his hand a royal sceptre? Well, they would crown Him now, and place in His hands the insignia of His royal dignity. They wove into a circle a prickly branch, the thorns of which, like long sharp nails, spread out all around it; and, seating Jesus upon the base of an antique column in the midst of the

courtyard, they threw over His shoulders a ragged cloak of purple. "This," they said to Him, "is your royal garment, O King of fools." And then, placing the thorny crown upon His head, they drove it down over His temples, while His Sacred Blood again fell over His eyes and down His cheeks and over His hair, already matted with the blood of the wounds with which His whole body was covered. And then, to complete the horrid picture, they put into His hands a reed for His sceptre. Here is the King of Kings treated in mock majesty before these inhuman soldiers.

How little did they dream that through all the centuries the relics of this crown which they had woven in mockery would be venerated as no royal crown of gold and precious stones of any king of earth! To-day at Notre Dame in Paris, in the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Rome, in the great majestic Cathedral of St. Peter, pilgrims from all the world over have come for many centuries to salute the crown and the thorns which in brutal mockery those soldiers had placed upon the head of the King of Kings, in their eyes at that moment only a fool who had dreamt of His royal inheritance.

Not once but many times through the centuries these sacred thorns have manifested the power of Christ, the Son of God. Again and again authentic witnesses have testified that on various occasions, but especially on Good Friday, they exuded drops of the color of blood, and the dead branch which had touched the Saviour's head blossomed forth into beautiful white flowers. Even in our own time this wonder has happened before the

eyes of credible witnesses. On Good Friday of 1910, and again in 1921, this wonderful thing happened in the Palatine Basilica of St. Nicholas in Bari. It was seen, not by a few people alone, but by an immense multitude of the faithful, among them many persons of high position, ecclesiastical and civil, and the fact of the miracle was legally attested by those who saw it. Besides these, many other wonderful signs have attested the sacredness of these relics of the crown of thorns which the soldiers had cruelly forced upon the head of Christ.

But leaving these brief considerations, let us go on with the narrative.

Jesus is now seated in the midst of the courtyard, His throne the base of an ancient column, upon His shoulders a ragged purple cloak, upon His head a crown of thorns and in His hands His sceptre, a poor weak reed. And this was the King of the Jews. To the eyes of these brutalized Roman soldiers the sight was one which aroused in them only the sentiment of a fierce merriment. They danced around His bowed figure, and as they passed Him they knelt before Him in derision, saying in mock humility the royal salutation: "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then, spitting on His Sacred Person, they seized the reed out of His hands and struck Him upon the head, calling out to Him: "Prophesy, prophesy, who is it that has struck Thee!" Not a word Jesus utters, no word of reproach, no word of complaint. Nothing but the perfect patience of the Son of God indicated His true royalty in the sufferings of that hour.

In the same way that His flagellation was borne meekly

for the salvation of all those who by thought, word, or deed would be guilty of carnal sin, so now this unspeakable mockery of His royalty was endured for the sins of all those who, by pride and arrogance, would offend the Majesty of God. It was meant especially to give a salutary admonition to all those who sit in high places, who are entrusted with the government of peoples and the leadership of nations, that in witnessing the sublime patience of the King of Heaven, in the midst of such awful humiliation, they would be warned against any temptation to pride and insolence and arrogance; and that in suffering their hour of adversity they might remember and be consoled by the sight of His Supreme Majesty, silent and patient under the most cruel privations and humiliations. But while it is meant especially as an admonition to all those in high authority, it has a lesson for all of us, for who is there among us, be he ever so lowly, who is always free from the vanity of silly pride?

The Ecce Homo

At last Pilate sent out word to bring again before him this Victim Whom he had ordered to be whipped. The command of the Roman Governor permitted no delay. Pilate could not be kept waiting; and so the soldiery hurried Jesus just as He was before the ruler. At the horrible spectacle which Christ presented, a shudder ran through the frame of Pilate. He had ordered Him to be whipped, indeed, but surely he never imagined that the soldiers would go to such barbarous extremes. And what meant this crown of thorns, this ragged cloak about His

shoulders? Instantly he read the signs. The soldiers in mockery had thus arrayed this Victim because He had said that He was the King of the Jews. He closed his eyes hoping to shut out the awful picture, and hurriedly he gave the command to bring the Prophet out upon the balcony above the forum, so that the priests, the Sanhedrim and the rabble, gazing upon so pitiable a spectacle, would be moved inevitably to compassion, and would realize that He had now suffered enough: that He had now been sufficiently humiliated; that surely He was no menace to their nation. He hoped that, thus moved, they might at last let Him be sent away without further hurt. (St. Gregory the Great in his homily on the Passion.)

While the soldiers, obeying Pilate's command, led Jesus out to the balcony above the street, the Governor again came into the courtyard and took his place on the terrace at the head of the great staircase below which the crowd still waited for his judgment. At that moment Christ appeared among the soldiers on the balcony above the great gateway, and Pilate, pointing to Christ, shouted to the people below: "Behold the Man!"

At the sight of that sad face with the thorny crown piercing His forehead, His eyes, so tender and beautiful, bathed in tears and in blood, His hands, so delicate and trembling, bound with knotted ropes, still holding the broken reed — at the sight of such a Victim, One Who had never done them aught of harm, but Who had benefited them in a thousand ways, an evident shudder ran through the crowd. Was it a shudder of compassion or

merely of surprise? The gentle eyes of Christ looked down with infinite tenderness upon the mob below Him. It was a glance of mercy, another grace granted, even then, to the wretches, whose hearts remained so obdurate. It was as if by this look of divine love He still hoped to win them away from further cruelty and more inexorable crime. His lips moved not, but His eyes gazed imploringly on them. "Ah, my people, is not this enough? Will you not, at least now, place a limit to your heartless violence? Must you go still further, and, by even worse infamy, close the gates of God's mercy as you open the gates of His Eternal Vengeance?"

Trembling, Pilate looked on. Still he hoped, observing that for a moment profound silence ruled the mob, that at last they were satisfied.

And below in an angle of the forum Mary, too, watched and trembled.

Then illusion — the next moment, a cry more cruel than ever rent the air. The high priests and the Sanhedrim were quick to recognize that this was only another maneuver of the Roman Governor, hoping to move the hearts of the people. They were enraged more than ever against Pilate now, and, rushing among the crowd, they roused them from their momentary silence into howls and yells of fanaticism. At first the crowd gave vent to a low grumbling murmur, and then, led by the high priests, they began fairly to scream: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" At the same time they gathered at the foot of the staircase with faces so filled with hatred as to indicate to Pilate that he had better not

trifle with them further. At the sight of such monstrous passion and rage, Pilate began to feel the deepest sentiments of disgust and disdain for them, and so he answered them: "Take Him you, and crucify Him, for I find no cause in Him."

Here again is the strangest contradiction in the words of Pilate. With one breath he says: "I find no cause in Him, no reason to condemn Him to death," and, as legally the Jews could put no one to death without the consent of the Roman Governor, why should he in the same breath say: "Take Him you, and crucify Him"?

Now at last the high priests, driven to despair by the duplicity of the Roman Governor, formulated the real accusation in their minds against Jesus. Up to where Pilate was standing they sent this challenge: "We have a law and according to the law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Clearly, then, it was the fact that Jesus claimed divinity for Himself that was the chief argument of the Sanhedrim against Him, and the reason why they clamored for His death.

St. John narrates that at these words Pilate was seized with a great fear. The Roman Governor was well trained in the law of the ancients, and had, like the pagans of his day, some vague idea of the divinity. Such religion as he had, when he thought of it at all, led him to see some sort of heavenly presence everywhere about him, in the seas, in the rivers, in the limpid springs and the groves and green orchards. He knew that Plato had spoken obscurely of one Who was to come as the Just One. He knew that Æschylus had written in wonderful poetry the

prefiguring of one Whom he named as the Beloved Son of the Father, Who would come some day from Heaven and illumine the minds of all men. He knew, too, that Virgil, the great Roman poet, had spoken of some wonderful event foreshadowing the coming of God on earth. And yet, skeptic as he had been hitherto, he had given little consideration to such things.

Now here in his presence stood One Who, according to those about Him, had done wonderful things. Even his wife, in a vague way, had hinted to him that very morning that here was the just Man of Whom the poets had spoken. Again he looked over at the balcony where Jesus stood. The sight of the calm majesty of Jesus in the midst of all His sufferings, of the dignity which even His wounded frame and the ragged, purple cloak could not conceal, suddenly filled his mind with the terrible thought: "Can this really be He?" And with the sound of the accusation of the Jews still in his ears, again he said to himself: "Is it possible that this is the Son of God?" He gazed on the figure of Christ, so sadly patient yet so majestic in His calm, and a terror seized upon his soul, and suddenly he made up his mind to interrogate again the Prophet. He must know the truth. He must hear from His own lips what He had to say of Himself.

Turning his back upon the Jews, he walked slowly and thoughtfully across the terrace and again entered the prætorium. He quickly summoned Christ once more before him. He bade Him come near to where he was seated. Then he rose and stood before Him face to face, a look of

awful eagerness in his eyes, and he said to Him: "Whence art Thou?" (St. John xix, 9.)

"Whence art Thou?" What could Pilate possibly have meant by such a question? Certainly no thought of the Prophet's terrestrial fatherland was in his mind, for he knew well that Jesus was a Galilean. He had no desire to reveal to this Prophet the doubts now passing in his mind, and so he put his question in this vague way, hoping anxiously to hear the Prophet tell him clearly something of His divine origin.

For some moments Pilate waited for the answer, and still no answer came. Why should Christ answer such a question? Had He not clearly told the Governor only a short time before that He had descended from Heaven? Why repeat it now? It had not moved Pilate to act justly before. Of what use, then, to say it all over? Christ made no answer to his question; and we realize now the perfect dignity of His silence. The skepticism of the Roman would impel him at best to begin a discussion with the Prophet. Jesus clearly foresaw the uselessness of such discussion. Besides, His very silence implicitly affirmed His divine origin.

Pilate, however, instead of respecting Christ's refusal to enter upon any discussion, became suddenly irritable. The pride of the Roman Governor began to assert itself. In the face of the silence of Christ, he began to feel that the Prophet did not show sufficient respect to the majesty of Rome, and so he rudely demanded: "Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?" (St.

John xix, 10.) This pretense of supreme power on the part of Cæsar's representative could not be allowed to pass unanswered, so the Master, raising His head in solemn dignity, said to the great and powerful Roman Governor: "Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that hath delivered Me to thee, hath the greater sin." (St. John xix, 11.)

How strange are these latter words! Yet their meaning was perfectly clear to the mind of Pilate. Their purpose was to indicate that, though the sin of Judas was greater, Pilate himself with all his compromises was still guilty of a great sin. And after these words, which must have made Pilate tremble, the Master in an undertone began to speak in a more intimate way with the Roman Governor, revealing to him still more of His heavenly doctrine. The Evangelists do not tell us what these words of Christ were, but one thing is certain, and St. John expressly indicates the effect, that, Pilate thereupon sought to set Him free. (St. John xix, 12.)

So the Roman Governor, his mind still agitated with conflicting emotions, stepped out again onto the terrace, and walking across the courtyard took his place once more at the head of the staircase where he was accustomed to address the people. His eyes wandered over the crowd of fanatics howling imprecations in the name of the Mosaic law. He read on their faces that they had not changed their determination to inflict the death penalty upon the Master. Nevertheless he said to them: "I repeat to you now what I have already told you, I

find no cause in this Man worthy of death and I intend to set Him free." The angry mob were only the more infuriated at these words. By this time the crowd was surging in threatening attitudes up towards the staircase, and on the roofs of the houses near by he saw that even the women and children had caught the contagion, and the air was rent with yells and screams of defiance to the Roman authority.

The legionaries, realizing that the populace by this time threatened a violent uprising, looked at the Governor with anxiety depicted on their faces, as if to say: "A word from you and we will make short work of this mob." Pilate had only to give a sign, but he had entered the path of weakness and compromise already and he had not the moral courage to turn back. The high priests and the Sanhedrim, their eyes fastened upon the face of Pilate, read instantly his indecision. They, keen as they were in such matters, struck upon an expedient which they felt sure would settle once for all the indecision of the Roman Governor, and they began to shout up at him: "If thou release this Man, thou art not Cæsar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." (St. John XIX, 12.)

Here we may note the daring impudence of these Jewish officials. When one accusation does not succeed, they instantly change their tactics and produce another. They began by declaring Jesus a malefactor. As this very generic term had no effect upon the mind of the pagan Governor, they then proceeded to cry out that He was a revolutionary and a rebel. Upon examination

Pilate also found these accusations to be false and without weight, so they returned to the combat and accused the Master of having made Himself the Son of God, and for that crime, guilty of an offense to be punished with death, here again Pilate remained unmoved. So at last they seized upon the only arm now left to them, abuse and threats. "If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

Pilate well knew what it meant to him if any such rumor as this reached Rome. He well knew the jealous character of those in supreme authority in Rome. Any doubt of the loyalty of the official the Emperor had placed in office became a very dangerous thing for the official. The mind of a tyrant can never brook the slightest appearance of even a difference of opinion. All this was perfectly clear to Pilate, and, when the high priests shrewdly made use of this knowledge, they knew well what they were about. It was a dangerous thing, they well understood, to threaten the Roman Governor in his own palace, but, as they had tried every other expedient only to see it fail, they were now determined, even at a great risk, to use this last weapon in their hands. And they had reckoned well upon its instantaneous effect. "Thou art not Cæsar's friend!" Hearing this, Pilate trembled.

He knew full well the suspicious character of the Emperor Tiberius, living aloof from Rome in his palace at the summit of the island of Capri. (Tacitus and Suetonius.) The Emperor's record was a very bloody one. Detested for his enormities in Rome, he feared for

his own safety and so took refuge in the palace of Capri, which was practically a fortress, well guarded by the sea about it, which separated it from the mainland. Pilate knew full well that if any rumor of this scene reached Capri, his career would be abruptly ended, for the one thing that Tiberius never forgave in his officials was the slightest weakness towards any criminal accused of rebellion against the Empire or the Emperor.

These reflections gripped the mind of the Governor and drove him to consider how utterly futile it would be to hold out against this vicious crowd, capable of ruining him and his fortunes forever. And, after all, why, in the face of things as he saw them, should he risk his own neck to save this Man from His own people, who knew Him, His history, and His pretensions much better than he did?

Still, the thought of a fearful injustice haunted him. The warning of his wife still rang in his ears. The intimate conversation which had passed unrecorded between Christ and himself, aloof from the mob in the piazza, had undoubtedly made a profound impression upon his soul. The battle now, as so often since, was between God and Cæsar, between eternal justice and mere expediency, between absolute truth and vacillating weakness, between the rights of Heaven and his own personal, temporal fortune. The struggle was fierce, but it lasted only a moment, and in the end selfishness won over truth and right. And so Pilate, still trembling with a cowardly emotion, finally declared his decision to the people. The Evangelists give in a few words this whole story of

the battle for right and the triumph of evil. "When Pilate heard these words, wishing to satisfy the people requiring that He might be crucified, their voices prevailed and Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required, and he released unto them him who for murder and sedition had been cast into prison, but Jesus he delivered up to their will." (St. John XIX, 13; St. Mark XV, 15; St. Luke XXIII, 24.)

O wretched judge! You thought by condemning Jesus, Whom you knew to be innocent, to satisfy the unjust claims of the Sanhedrim and the mob, and by so doing to save your own head and your own fortunes, but oftentimes even shrewd selfishness defeats its own end, and such was the case with Pilate. Josephus Flavius narrates that within a very short time after this he was condemned to exile and finally he died a wretched death. How many a time during that exile the memory of these sins must have come before his vision! How clearly he must have realized that all his weak compromises availed him nothing! How often he must have wished that he had followed the higher promptings of his soul and turned a deaf ear to the voices of the mob and the urgings of his own baser nature! True, as St. Augustine remarks in this connection, his crime was great, but in comparison how infinitely greater the crime of the Sanhedrim and the Jewish nation!

Pilate, even to the very end, even after he had decided to deliver up Jesus to the mob, still clung to the hope that the guilt would not rest upon his shoulders. The rite of

purification, by which the Jews hoped to cleanse themselves from the stains of sin and their defects, was well known in the Jewish law, but even among the pagans this idea of purification was not unknown. For example, the lustral water of the Romans had something of this meaning. To wash the hands in a public ceremony was a rite associated with an act of purification.

With this idea in mind, Pilate called to one of his attendants to bring him water wherewith to wash his hands. Immediately a servant appeared with a ewer filled with water and a basin, and bearing on his arm a large linen cloth. Pilate stretched his hands out over the basin and the attendant poured over them the cleansing water from the ewer. The crowd watched him, wondering what now was in Pilate's mind. They had not long to wait, for the Governor, turning towards them, said in a loud voice: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Man. Look you to it." (St. Matthew xxvii, 24.) And, saying this he wiped his hands on the linen cloth offered him by his servant.

If he thought that this shifting of all responsibility of guilt from his own shoulders to the Jewish people would move them finally from their murderous designs, he judged poorly. Nothing now could move them. In fact, every attempt of his to shift responsibility only infuriated them all the more, and so they railed back at the Governor, crying out: "His blood be upon us and upon our children!"

In these words and by this proclamation they accepted, not only for themselves personally, but for the whole

Jewish nation, the awful guilt of deicide. In that motley crowd all ranks of the Jewish people were represented. The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians, the scribes, the doctors of the law, the servants of the temple, the rich merchants and the rabble, all were there; and as from every throat arose this defiance to Heaven itself, they publicly accepted not only the guilt, but the awful punishments of God which soon would destroy them and their nation and scatter the remnants of a proud race, homeless wanderers, throughout the world. The words of the Evangelist are: "The whole people" — "universus populus." And so as a race and as a nation they acted and not merely as individuals, and therefore as a race, until they had repented of their crime, the wrath of God would follow them. Not only upon themselves had they thus invoked the anger of Heaven in defiance of all right and even of all human law, but in so many words they acted as the delegates of their own children and their children's children: "His blood be upon us and upon our children." In the blindness of their passion they were defying the very powers of Heaven.

Surely for the nation and for the race this inheritance of a penalty called down upon themselves is a dire legacy at the very thought of which we are moved to pity; and all during the centuries since that cry for the blood of Christ went forth, all during the long weary years since the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Hebrew people, the Church of Christ has lifted her voice in sad lamentation. On the very day when she celebrates the sad memory of this event the prayers of her children

are tenderly offered up to the all-just God, begging for this race and this people, once the chosen people of God, pardon, mercy, and finally forgiveness. The consideration of this public avowal, on the part of the Sanhedrim and the crowd, that they would take upon their shoulders and upon the shoulders of their posterity the whole responsibility moved even Renan to write: "If ever a crime was the crime of a whole nation, surely the death of Christ was such a crime."

It is true that primarily the heads and the leaders of the Jewish people were principally to blame, for the blindness of their passion was the result of the insincerity of their lives, the hypocrisy of their professions, the jealousy of their hearts and their selfish ambitions. The designs of God pointed to Jesus as the true Messias. They had but to read their own Prophets to realize this clearly, and of course they knew well all that the Prophets had to say concerning the expected Messias; but they had made up their minds as to the kind of a Messias they wanted and they would accept no other even if He came from God.

Their Messias was to be a great and rich and powerful king. That was the sort of Messias worthy of the great and proud Hebrew nation. Their Messias must do them credit before the world. He must show these pagans that their king was a man of worldly wisdom, worldly glory and pomp and influence. Why, this Jesus was a nobody, son of a poor carpenter, a miserable Galilean with no rich or powerful relatives, no wealth, no worldly consideration whatever. In fact, he was a mere laughing-stock, a

visionary; yes, a visionary, but a stubborn and conceited visionary. He had upset all their calculations. He had contradicted all their expectations. Such a man as this, — Messias! It was folly in the extreme; but not folly alone, it was highly criminal. This Man the Son of God? Why, this was not merely insanity, it was blasphemy.

And so they argued on with themselves until in the end it mattered really very little whether this was God's design or not. They would have none of it. They defied Heaven and impiously cried out to even Heaven itself: "We shall accept no such Messias as this. We shall put an end to all these foolish pretensions of this self-styled Son of God. We shall put Him to death, and we shall take upon our shoulders and the shoulders of our whole nation the responsibility of our action."

But the rabble, too, were to blame. Christ for three years had gone about among the people doing good. All over Galilee and Judea He mingled with the poor and the downtrodden and the outcast. They came to Him with their burdens and their griefs and He sat down with them, and with the deepest sympathy and compassion lifted the burden from their shoulders to His own. They brought their sick to Him and He cured them. Along the way He met the leper and He cleansed him. At the street corners the blind raised to Him their sightless eyes. He touched them and they saw. He spoke to them sweetly of the wonders of Heaven, of the beauties of the Kingdom of God, and so He lifted them out of their gloomy and drab lives into a world of Heavenly visions and glorious hopes. He gathered their prattling children about Him;

He laid His divine hand upon their heads and blessed them. They wandered after Him day after day, hanging upon His words. In their wonder and their eagerness at hearing from His lips the charming and beautiful parables with which He knew so well how to portray the finest and most alluring ideals, they left their tiresome tasks and followed Him along the roads out into the fields. There, again and again, they sat upon the grass enchanted, inspired by His simple eloquence, clothing in the simplicity of their own speech the wonders of Eternity.

They felt for Him the profoundest reverence as a Prophet of God. Men had never taken any care even to think of their souls or their burdens until He came among them. His name was upon every lip, among the people of the village, among the farmers in the fields and the fishermen by the lake. His figure was so full of a supreme dignity, touched with the tenderness of gentleness, that they realized that there was something royal about His person, something divine about His words and His deeds. And so on one occasion they gathered about Him and insisted upon making Him their king. And now here He is before them a criminal under trial for His life, and the worst accusation they now could bring against Him was that He had made Himself the King of the Jews.

Oh, the inconstancy of the people! Oh, the fickleness of their popularity and their affection! Yesterday they were forcing Him to sit upon the throne as the royal descendant of David, to rule over them and to govern them, and now, because openly He has avowed Himself to be in very truth the King of the Kingdom of Truth,

they turn away from Him; they listen to the base insinuations of the jealous Pharisees; they close their eyes to the memories of all that He had done for them and see only the malicious vision of those who hated Him. Yesterday they raised their voices in loud hosanna and they strewed the streets with palms and welcomed Him as One Who came to them in the name of the Lord. Now they rend their clothing in frantic rage at the sight of this meek and broken remnant of humanity, crowned in mockery; and they too, like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, feel only ashamed of His pretensions to be any king of their nation. They rend the air with their cries: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

This was the voice of the people, which we are so often told is the voice of God! Woe to him who relies only upon such a voice! Alas for him who is fool enough to place his hopes in the fickle and ever-changing praise or blame of the constantly varying multitude, who to-day are swayed by this whim and to-morrow by another; who to-day follow in the wake of those who would lead them on to their highest destinies, and to-morrow, at a beck, wheel about and run in exactly the opposite direction! So, not only did the high priests and the Pharisees bring down upon themselves the vengeance of Heaven, but the condemnation of God fell with equal justice upon the foolish and fickle betrayals and treacheries of the populace.

Well St. Matthew writes: "Wherefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of them that killed the Prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your

fathers . . . that upon you may come all the just blood that hath been shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the Just even unto the blood of Zacharias, whom you killed between the temple and the altar. . . . Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate." (St. Matthew XXIII, 31 to 38.) These words vividly portray the terrible malediction of God upon a people He had chosen as His very own. But they clearly and frankly had called God's malediction down upon themselves, and sad as the thought must make all who consider it, that curse clearly still rests upon the whole Jewish people. In our compassion and our commiseration we cannot fail, even while acknowledging the supreme justice of God's action, nevertheless, in pity, to pray that God's justice may soon be satisfied and that His hand may be finally lifted from the bowed backs of the race He had once so much loved and had loaded with favors.

From that day until this the Jewish people have bewailed their tragic fate. In Jerusalem, along the valley called Tyropœon, rises a solid wall of enormous blocks of travertine. For about sixty meters in length the wall is uncovered. The rest of it is hidden by houses and by ruins, and this part of the wall exposed to view is called by the Jews the "Place of Lamentation": "Kautal Maarbé." It is known to Gentiles as the "Wailing Place of the Jews." This wall antedates the time of Christ and forms a part of the support of the great piazza in the midst of which arose the wonderful temple of Solomon, where now is the mosque of Omar. After the siege of Jerusalem,

which took place about the year 70 A.D., the Jews were forbidden to enter the Holy City. Once a year, however, by paying a large tribute, they were allowed to come and weep before this ancient wall of their once beloved Jerusalem. Even to-day, when the Jews are allowed to inhabit the Holy City, though they are forbidden to enter the sacred precincts of the temple, they are free still to go down to the wall beneath and lament the loss of their temple and their nationhood. And there, in fact, they may be seen now gathered before the sacred wall, some bent in sad contemplation; some with the Sacred Scriptures in their hands reading again of the past glories of their race; others reciting the psalms of David; some, seated upon the blocks of stone about the place, their heads in their hands, pour forth their sad lament, while others, leaning their foreheads against the stones, kiss again and again the sacred wall and bathe it with their tears.

Every Friday, or on the occasion of a festival day, as the sun sinks in the west, groups of these descendants of a once great people gather about the wall, the women on one side, the men on the other, and surely the spectacle is a sad one. Not the sign of a smile, not the least vestige of joy, is pictured on their sorrowful countenances. It is the remnant of the Jewish people bewailing the terrible destiny which has overcome everything in which they once had gloried. Out of the little group arises the sound of a solemn chant. It is the Rabbi who intones the sad litany of lamentation: "Here at the foot of the temple which is destroyed," and the people answer in chorus:

"Here we sit solitary and weep." The litany prolongs itself and becomes sadder and more sad. They confess the sins of their forefathers, of their kings, of their priests; they bewail in mournful tones their terrible lot, and the litany ends: "May peace and happiness enter into Sion! May the branch of the root of Jesse flourish in Jerusalem!" For more than a thousand years this wall has heard these lamentations and these prayers, and so they will continue to go up to Heaven until the anger of God and His just judgment upon them are finally appeased. So that, putting aside the hardness and the unbelief of their hearts, they verify, at last, the divine promises predicted by St. Paul (Romans xi); and this people who once betrayed the Son of God, at last, kneeling down, will acknowledge His Divinity, accept Him as their Messias and become once again the friends of God. Then, oh, happy day! the glory of Jerusalem will return above the Holy City; then at last will peace enter into Sion.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONDEMNATION

The Roman Governor, having made the cowardly decision to yield to the clamors of the Jewish people, proceeds to declare the formal sentence of condemnation against Jesus.

According to the laws and the customs of Rome, always rigorous in the matter of legal formality, the sentence of death had to be pronounced with all the solemnities and formalities established by the code. It must be pronounced in a public place by the judge seated in the judgment place — pro tribunali — and in the presence of the prisoner to be condemned. If any of these formalities were lacking, the sentence became null. This was a wise guarantee by which the Roman jurisprudence desired to safeguard public justice.

The tribunal, called, in Greek, "Bema," that is, the judgment seat, was constructed of solid stone and was erected high above the pavement of the courtyard before the palace of the prætorium. Pilate, therefore, to carry out the sentence legally, should take his place seated upon the tribunal thus erected, and, have placed before him the prisoner, Who was Jesus. St. John thus describes the scene: — Pilate, hearing these words, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" had Jesus led out and he sat in judgment in the place which is called the Lithostrotos, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. That is to say, he had Christ, still bound, led

out of the prætorium, down the staircase leading to the palace, out into the public forum, where the mob was gathered. From his place on the terrace, Pilate now descended the royal staircase and, passing through the crowd which the guard pushed aside to give room to the Roman Governor, he walked between the ranks on either side, glowering upon them with glances of contempt as he passed them. He then mounted the steps of the tribunal and sat down ready to pronounce sentence. A profound stillness reigned in the forum and the crowd, conscious of the solemnity of the moment, at last was silent.

In the silence of that scene is typified the consternation of Heaven and earth. The fatal hour was about to strike which the Prophets of old had foreseen and predicted. The pagan world represented by the Roman Governor, and the people of God represented by this crowd gathered in the Lithostrotos, after long wrangling and discussion, after combating every inspiration of grace, every whisper of their hearts, had at last agreed. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stood before the people of His own world waiting for the solemn sentence of death to be pronounced against Him, and in that solemn silence the angels of Heaven itself were still.

A hush fell upon the whole earth and through all the courts of God. It was the end of an epoch. The sound of the death knell would soon be heard above the silence. The patience of Heaven had been exhausted. There was nothing left even for God Himself to do now but to wait in silence for the hour of a terrible doom to strike. And, as

if to note the precise time of this epochal moment, the Evangelist notes with historic precision: "It was about the sixth hour." (St. John XIX, 14.)

The Romans divided the day and also the night into four great hours, longer or shorter according to the season The first of these hours began with the rising of the sun and ended in the middle of the morning, that is, at about nine o'clock by our time at the season of the equinox. The third hour began from this time and ended at midday, when the sun was in the zenith. The sixth hour began with midday and ended in the middle of the afternoon, that is, about three o'clock in our time and again in the season of the equinox. The ninth hour began at about three o'clock and ended with evening. The words of the Evangelists, therefore, mean that it was towards noon when Pilate ascended the tribunal to deliver the solemn sentence of death against Jesus; that is to say, it was about eleven o'clock according to our method of reckoning the hours.

Let us return to the scene of the judgment. Pilate now realized that all his promises had been in vain and that in the end he had yielded weakly to the clamors of the high priests. From his elevated place in the tribunal he cast a wearied and impatient gaze first at the officials of the Sanhedrim and the high priests gathered about him, then with a long and sweeping glance he surveyed the motley crowd in the piazza. Finally, he let his eyes rest for a long time upon the form of the Prisoner before

him. It had been a long and weary morning for him, filled to overflowing with excitement and agitation. He salved his soul with the thought that he had endeavored in every way possible to escape what now seemed to be the inevitable. To the last, doubt haunted his soul. Even now, as he sat there, his mind was filled with a conflict of thoughts, which only served to cover him with confusion. Suddenly he aroused himself. He must not expose the Roman dignity to further danger. He must have done with it all; he must rid himself at once and forever of this awful incubus which weighed upon his soul. The Roman formula of condemnation was exceedingly brief and peremptory. It was a short formula, but brevity is the sign of power, and in her legal acts, Rome wasted no words. Adjusting his toga, he leaned back in dignity and pronounced the solemn sentence which was to settle everything: "Ibis ad crucem"—"Thou shalt go to the cross"; and glancing towards the centurion, standing beside him, who was to carry out the sentence, he said in a voice of command: "I, miles, expedi crucem"—"Go, soldier, bring forth the cross." Thus was passed the horrible sentence.

With a brevity which indicated that all hope of escape had vanished, the decision was made. The final sentence of condemnation to death by crucifixion was passed by the representative of the Roman imperial authority. From that moment, Christ, having been publicly declared a blasphemer against the Synagogue, and a rebel against civil authority, could expect no mercy anywhere. There was nothing left but to await the utter completion

of the awful tragedy. Casting His eyes meekly over the howling mob which now surrounded Him, Christ saw only too clearly that from this moment until death would mercifully deliver Him from His torments He could expect nothing at their hands but the vilest maltreatment and the cruelest of cruel injuries.

Now, indeed, had arrived the moment for the final triumph of the powers of darkness.

The Blessed Mother of Jesus watched with eager eyes from a corner of the portico. Where she stood, accompanied by St. John and surrounded by some of the pious women, she could see Pilate as he walked majestically across the courtyard, and, with dignified steps, mounted the tribunal. Breathlessly she waited to see what the Roman Governor would finally do. She had not long to wait. At last the words of the sentence of death, pronounced firmly and authoritatively by the Governor, reached over the agitated multitude to where she, half hidden, was standing. Again the sword of sorrow entered her tender heart. She knew now that all hope was in vain. The Blessed Mother was almost on the point of swooning when St. John and the holy women gently and tenderly put their arms about her and silently led her away.

Having now delivered himself of the dread incubus which had been weighing upon his soul, Pilate, pluming himself upon his fine conduct of the case, arose, gathered his toga about him in graceful folds, and descended majestically the steps of the Bema. Feeling more than ever the importance of his office, he looked superciliously at

those about him, and with a dignified tread, accompanied by the guard, he walked across the forum, while the rabble, in grateful acknowledgment of his judicial wisdom, bowed obsequiously before him as he passed. At the foot of the staircase which led to the interior court of the palace above, he hesitated for a moment. Turning slightly back and looking over his shoulder, he glanced for an instant only at the Prisoner he had just condemned, already in the midst of His torturers.

Though a weak man, undoubtedly Pilate was not utterly bad. All through the case he could scarcely conceal a certain note of sympathetic understanding of Jesus. He had allowed his weakness to be played upon by fear, but his soul was far from feeling complete satisfaction in the scene which had just transpired. He was beginning already to feel the consequences.

So, slightly shrugging his shoulders as if to say to himself: "What was there left for me to do?" he suppressed a sigh and then slowly and pensively mounted the steps, crossed the courtyard and entered the palace.

Down below in the forum the tumult was at its height. The air was filled with imprecations and the filthy speech of the rabble. Some of the crowd, already weary of the agitation of the whole morning, left the piazza and wearily wandered homeward. Others, their curiosity still unsatisfied, pushed and crowded hither and thither in an attempt to get a closer look at the face of the Victim; and in the midst of all the hurly-burly were the high priests and the officials of the Sanhedrim, who, now that they had forced Pilate to yield, urged the soldiers to hurry

along the execution of the sentence. The day was fast passing and the evening would be the great vigil of the Passover, when the Law demanded that the people should do no more work, but should retire to repose preparatory to the great feast. So it was urgent at all costs that the Victim should be hurried to the place of execution as soon as possible. The cursed work finished, priests and people could return to their homes and prepare for the sacrifices.

Indeed, according to both the Roman and the Hebrew law, the sentence of death should be followed as soon as possible by execution of the victim. So, in haste and in fury the cross was dragged out across the square, the soldiers took their places, and the priests formed the procession. The vile rabble, hungry only for some more excitement and agitation, ran about hither and thither trying their best to secure places from which they could see all that was happening.

There in the middle of the square the guards rudely began to strip Christ of His clothing, and, first of all, they seized the ragged, purple cloak with which they had clothed Him in mockery of His royalty. They then proceeded with rough hands to tear the crown of thorns from His wounded head. St. Matthew (xxvii, 31) says: "... They took off the cloak from Him and put on Him His own garments."

The clothing of one condemned to death belonged by right to the soldiers who executed the sentence: it was the perquisite of their office. We can well imagine the

ribald jests and the coarse jokes which during this painful scene were bandied about among the brutal soldiery. What was this Man now to them but a condemned criminal? And, as so frequently happens, he who has lost the favor of the crowd may well expect the most unfeeling and heartless treatment from it. The pure and innocent Jesus was compelled to stand shivering in His nakedness, while, without sense of shame or decency, and least of all of any slightest tinge of modesty, these hardened wretches tore from His wounded Body His cloak and tunic, which adhered to the congealed blood of His multiplied wounds.

From out the portico into the piazza another band of soldiers marched, guarding between their ranks two other criminals who had also been condemned to the cross. They were a pair of brigands, a band of which had infested the desert between Palestine and Egypt and who lived by murder and highway robbery. (St. Luke XXIII, 32.) The high priests were determined that nothing should be left undone which might rob Jesus of the slightest right to sympathy on the part of the crowd, thus to indicate that He was worthy only of infamy and derision. Therefore they obtained from the court permission to execute at the same time these two robbers, infamous for their public crimes against the lives of Jewish citizens and against the well-being of the State. They thus shrewdly planned that these two wretches should accompany Jesus, so that the crowd might understand that He, like them, was a menace to the Jews and an enemy of the State.

At the same time some of the soldiers dragged forth the

other two crosses upon which these two robbers would die. The custom of the Romans was to compel the condemned man to carry his own cross upon his shoulders from the place of judgment to the place of execution. We know this on the authority of Plautus and other Latin writers. That this penalty also was inflicted upon Christ we know by the express testimony of St. John: "And bearing His own cross, He went forth." (St. John XIX, 17.) And, indeed, Our Blessed Lord had foreseen and foretold that this should happen when He said to His Apostles: "If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." (St. Mark VIII, 34.)

The Title of the Cross

Suetonius tells us that, according to Roman custom, when a slave was crucified, one of the soldiers headed the procession marching toward the place of execution, carrying what was known as the title. This was a large tablet upon which might be read the cause of the condemnation. Eusebius tells us that Attalus, the glorious martyr of Lyons, bore such a title upon his breast as he came into the amphitheatre to be killed. In fact, we see the carrying out of this custom narrated in many of the acts of the early Martyrs.

This Roman usage was also the custom among the Hebrews. At the head of the procession a herald cried out the name of the prisoner, the crime and the penalty, and he invited all those who heard him to disprove, if they could, the justice of the sentence. The judge in the case, alone, had the right to inscribe upon the title whatever

words he thought might indicate the cause of his sentence. In the case of Jesus, it was the duty of Pilate to carry out this custom. So one of the officials, sent by the centurion who was to oversee the work of execution, ran to the Governor and asked him to inscribe the title which would precede Christ in the cortège, and which would finally be nailed to the cross above His head.

To this request of the officer Pilate answered gloomily: "Write upon that title, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.'" Struck with surprise at Pilate's command, the officer hesitated; but Pilate, now irritated by the officer's delay, made an imperious gesture, and so the guard wrote slowly and carefully the words, first in Hebrew, then in Greek, and finally, underneath the other two, in Latin, the title of Jesus Christ upon the Cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Once again, whatever may have been in the mind of the Roman Governor, the eternal and inscrutable designs of God were being infallibly fulfilled. Even to the very last, the predictions of the holy Prophets were being verified in every detail. Not all the insane hatred and jealousy of the Great Council of the Sanhedrim, not all the weakness and vacillation and perfidy of the representative of the imperial power of Rome could, in the end, prevail against a power in Whose hands they were but the veriest pigmies. And thus to the Jewish nation, blinded by selfishness, to the high civilization of Greece, whose refinement was only superficial, to the great Roman world, the world of power and majesty and conquest, this title proclaimed that the glory of God was revealed

forever in the humiliations and sufferings of Christ Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind.

This title almost in its entirety is still preserved in the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Rome. Upon the millions and millions of crucifixes venerated with love by the faithful now, and in all centuries, that glorious title still holds its honored place.

CHAPTER XII

THE JOURNEY TO CALVARY

We read in the ancient Latin authors, Tacitus and Seneca, for instance, that, according to Roman law, when the judge had no lictors in his court, a privilege reserved only to the supreme magistrates of the Republic, the sentence of death was given for execution to a centurion, that is, a captain, the head of a company. Pilate, being simply the Roman Governor of Judea, had no lictors among the officials of his court, and so, as the law prescribed, a centurion with a company of soldiers was delegated to carry out the sentence. This centurion, we shall later see, was not only a witness to the death of Jesus upon the Cross, but afterwards, touched by divine grace, gave glorious testimony of his faith — the grace granted him at the foot of the Cross.

Alongside the Roman soldiers, the Pharisees, mounted upon horses, took part in the sad procession which now was forming in the courtyard. The leaders of the Synagogue, desirous of manifesting to the whole people that they had succeeded in their fatal work, sat proudly upon their horses and still urged on the multitude of the Jews. Thus, the Jew and the Gentile, representing the world of that time, took their full share of the dreadful responsibility of shedding the blood of the Son of God. Thus, too, gazing at both Jew and Gentile at the foot of His Cross, Christ begged His Father that His Sacred Blood

would bring final salvation to both Jew and Gentile. Raised above the earth, He prayed that He might draw all hearts towards Him and so at last bring both Jew and Gentile into the unity of that divine family, which is His Church.

It is true, indeed, that the Sanhedrim had publicly accepted all the responsibility for the death of Jesus and had openly cried out to Pilate: "His blood be upon us and upon our children." But God in His great mercy did not ratify this sacrilegious oath, for out of the Jewish nation and the Hebrew race were to come soon the most faithful and loyal followers of Jesus, who willingly would lay down their lives for love of Him; and from that time until the end of all time, the mercy of God is ever ready to receive into His sacred fold the descendants of those who so impiously called down upon their whole race the wrath of God. Peter and James and John and the other Hebrews who, at the sight of Christ upon the Cross, struck their breasts and went down to the city with the seed of faith in their souls were soon to testify that the mercy of God was greater than the perfidy of their leaders. There, in the very city of Jerusalem, would soon be born the infant Church; there the root of the great tree would come forth, whose branches should extend to the farthest limits of the world.

The merits of the blood of Christ would overcome the false designs of the heartless Sanhedrim. As St. Augustine so beautifully writes: "The blood of Christ was shed for the redemption of all sinners, and so infinite was its value that it blotted out even the sins of those who had shed it."

The day when the Hebrew people, opening their eyes at last to the true light of Heaven, will acknowledge the sin of their nation and weep for the punishments their rulers have brought upon them will be a day filled with the tender mercy of God. On that day, as St. Paul tells us, they will be engrafted upon the Tree of Life, which is the Church. Let us pray God that some day will be realized the prayer of Christ: "And there shall be one flock and one Shepherd." And here, too, we may well repeat those other wonderful words of St. Paul: "Oh, the depth of the riches, of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways!" (Romans xi, 33.)

The Place of the Crucifixion

According to Roman custom, the crucifixion took place outside the city at a point where several roads verged, so that the passersby might be terrified at the sight of this awful penalty; and the Jewish custom in this coincided with that of the Romans. From the time of Moses to the time of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, we find that the sentence of capital punishment was executed, not in the city, but outside the walls — extra castra — and this was all the more necessary because the victim must be buried somewhere near the place of execution and with him also the instruments with which the execution was accomplished. Now, we know very well that burial within the city was severely prohibited according to the Hebrew law.

Jesus, therefore, must walk out of Jerusalem, the Cross upon His shoulders, towards the place of execution. All

this was clearly prefigured in the writings of the Old Law. Isaac, intended as a victim of sacrifice, goes out of his father's house bearing upon his innocent shoulders the wood which would be lighted for his sacrifice. Besides, every year, on the day of the Great Expiation among the Jews, the Hebrew people had under their eyes an eloquent image of the sacrifice of the Redeemer. On that day a goat, chosen with great care, and then laden, as it were, with the sins of the people, was driven out by the High Priest into the open country, and with blood the people were sprinkled. Mystically significant, this, of the sacrifice of the Son of God. All this St. Paul afterwards recalls to the Jews in his letter to the Hebrew people. (Hebrews IX and X.)

Indeed, Our Blessed Lord Himself, only four days before His Passion, speaking before a great crowd, among whom were the scribes and the Pharisees, took particular care to make a distinct allusion to the scene of His Passion and Death by describing to them the picture of the faithless laborers in the vineyard, who drove the son of their master out of the vineyard and then killed him that they might rob him of his inheritance. Those who heard Him on that occasion evidently understood well the full meaning of the figure, for Jesus, at the end of the parable, said to them: "What, therefore, will the lord of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these husbandmen and will give the vineyard to others." Which they, hearing, said to Him: "God forbid!" But He, looking on them, said: "What is this, then, that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected the same is become

the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be bruised, and upon whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder.'" And the chief priests and the scribes sought to lay hands on Him, for they knew that He spoke this parable to them.

At the time, therefore, it was clear that the Pharisees and the scribes knew perfectly well that Christ was clearly indicating the manner of His death and their awful responsibility in it and the consequences which would follow. Nevertheless, blinded by passion and hatred, by anger and jealousy, they soon forgot; and neither prophecies nor figures nor parables nor admonitions could now avail to make them see the true light beaming there effulgently before their very eyes.

The place of the Crucifixion is historically certain and beyond all discussion. Innumerable writings, all tradition, and many monuments place it beyond doubt. To the west of Jerusalem at the northwest corner of the city, outside the gate called "antiqua," and not far from the walls, arose a rocky hill, called in Hebrew, "Golgotha," and by the Latins, "Calvary." This was the place of crucifixion designated by those in authority in Judea. Near by were the various roads which led from the Porta Antiqua to Bethlehem, to Joppe and to the other towns towards the west. Around about it were the gardens and groves where the Jews, coming from other towns and villages to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, set up their tents in great number. So the place fulfilled all the prescriptions of the Law and was admirably suited to the purpose which the leaders of the Jewish people now had

in mind. The cross elevated upon this hill would be visible, not only to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but to all strangers camped about the foot of the hill and to all the travelers that passed up and down the several roads at its foot. And so it might well be said that Our Blessed Lord in the moment of His Crucifixion was a spectacle to the world, to the angels and to all men.

The distance from the prætorium, or the palace where Pilate lived, to Calvary is about a mile, and, though the distance is not great, to traverse it is a fatiguing effort. From the forum the road descends to the valley in the midst of the city, and from there it rises rapidly to the Porta Antiqua, thence upward to the hill of Calvary. Calvary is not, as some may imagine, a high mountain. Nevertheless, the journey from the valley to the gate and from there to the top of Golgotha is no easy one. What must it have been to Jesus, overcome with weakness and fatigue, overwhelmed with suffering and a thousand emotions, borne down by the heavy weight of the Cross upon His shoulders? Had not the invisible angels of God been there to support and sustain Him, He could never have made the journey alive.

Command was issued by the centurion to start the procession, and the scribes and the Pharisees, with triumph and derision written on their ugly faces, hearing the word of command, "March!", gave their word of command to the rabble about them: "Here is an end at last to this whole ridiculous folly. Go on, go on! Soon we shall see it all finished forever." The heavy Cross is laid

upon the shoulders of Jesus and the two robbers follow along, each bearing his cross. The world at that time boasted of its great civilization. We see in this scene how deep that civilization reached into their minds and hearts.

Many pious souls who have spent their lives in meditation upon the scenes of the Passion, and who have been rewarded with a deep insight into all its various incidents, tell us that when the Cross was dragged out and held up before Jesus He leaned towards it, put His sacred arms tenderly about it, kissed it lovingly, thus saluting the altar upon which He would offer up the holocaust of love to His Eternal Father, and from which would come the redemption of the world.

As He passed out through the gate of the piazza, the soldiers jostled Him as He was led along. Before them ran the herald, holding the title of the Cross and shouting the words to the crowd. In the midst of the guard, Jesus wearily dragged the heavy Cross, and behind Him came the two thieves. As He stood for a moment, at the head of the road leading down to the valley, He saw before Him an enormous crowd gathering from all the houses throughout the city. Upon the roofs a great multitude had assembled, and over the whole scene arose the rumbling and the low murmuring of a thousand voices.

Jesus looked at them and the thought came, 'When the shepherd is stricken the flock is dispersed.' A great wave of compassion passed over His soul and His face portrayed an inexpressible grief. He saw before Him, not merely the Jews of His day, but He beheld in vision the terrible scenes of the destruction of the city and the universal

dispersion of the Hebrew race. Oh, yes, they would pay the penalty of their crime; that was written. But, nevertheless, He thought of what might have been, had they remained true to the revelations, which, during so many centuries, God had vouchsafed them for their understanding and direction.

He loved Jerusalem and He loved them. Was He not, also, a Jew in the flesh? With all their sins, He loved them with a special tenderness and affection. All this passed across His mind in the few seconds during which He stood at the top of the road looking down at the people gathering in the valley beneath Him. Step by step He began to go down the long descent, and as He passed through the gathering crowds on all sides He heard only words of insult and abuse. This conduct was entirely in accord with Oriental customs, and, indeed, the prescriptions of the Talmud prohibited all compassion for a condemned criminal. On the contrary, they invited the people to insult and abuse him.

Slowly, slowly the procession goes down the hill, coming at last to the junction of another road which stretches from the gate of Ephraim crossing the valley Tyropœon. Here occurred a scene which no words can describe.

The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Stations

Stumbling in His weakness, no longer able even to totter over the rude pavement, Jesus falls to the ground. At the junction of the two streets, sheltered by the angle of the buildings, a little group had stood waiting. It

was the Blessed Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with the holy women still about her. The sight of His Blessed Mother, the look of unspeakable grief upon her face, the tender, compassionate look of love which beamed from those eyes bedimmed with tears, the glance of understanding which from her holy countenance traversed the crowd and met the eyes of her suffering Son, was a sorrow so penetrating that, added to the fatigue and the anguish already undergone, it so moved Him from head to foot that the strength of His body left Him, and He fell under His Cross.

Just then, coming along the street from the country, the soldiers saw a man of robust build. There was no time to be lost, and so they rudely summoned this man, Simon of Cyrene, and ordered him to help Jesus to carry His Cross.

The incident of this fall of Our Blessed Lord has been handed down by constant and universal tradition. The fact that Simon of Cyrene was ordered to help Christ in carrying the heavy burden of the Cross is narrated expressly by the three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The place of the first fall is distinctly pointed out by authentic tradition. Indeed, unless something of this kind had happened to Our Blessed Lord to indicate His extreme weakness, doubtless the soldiers would not have given themselves the trouble to ask Simon to lend his assistance.

Authentic tradition also assures us of the meeting at this place of Jesus with His Blessed Mother. The gospel of Nicodemus, although apocryphal, nevertheless, is a

document of the very earliest Christian times, and voices, without doubt, very ancient tradition.

The fact that the early Christians held this tradition to be sacred and authentic is proved by the fact that at this spot they erected a little sanctuary, which the earliest pilgrims to Jerusalem had seen with their own eyes and had recorded in their letters. The little chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. It is recorded that in the thirteenth century this little chapel was already in ruins. A topographical map of Jerusalem designed in the year 1308 indicates the place of this chapel. When the little church had fallen to complete ruin, the Mohammedans built over it a public bath. But notwithstanding the change in the use, the name and the tradition stood firm. To-day the place is held by the Catholic Armenians, who, in building their residence on the spot, found, at a depth of ten or twelve meters, the ruins of the walls of the ancient church with its mosaic pavement. The archæologists testify that these ruins date back certainly to the seventh, possibly to the fifth century, and these remnants of the ancient church now form the crypt of the present one. On one side of that mosaic pavement is a white square space with a beautiful border done in mosaic. In the middle of this white space is the impression of two small sandals which point in the direction of the angle of the two streets; and this singular tracery upon the white pavement indicated without doubt that at that spot stood the Blessed Mother, and that there took place the sad meeting with her Son. So true it is, that even the ruins are books which keep alive many

holy traditions of which the written books say but little.

Let us continue our meditation and return to the sorrowful scene of the fall of Jesus.

The soldiers, already weary of so many delays and desirous only of finishing their ignominious work, looked on, for a moment, as Jesus lay upon the pavement at their feet, and then became furiously impatient. St. Luke tells us that among the crowd which followed Jesus were a great many women who wept and lamented. (St. Luke XXIII, 27.) After hearing the sentence of Pilate pronounced, St. John and the holy women had led Mary away. They had brought her down to this angle of the roads in the valley below, and there, with pallid face, her eyes red with weeping, she waited. She heard from above the blare of the trumpet of the herald, and she had heard resounding upon the pavement the onward march of the soldiers. She folded her veil about her face, and, leaning against the wall of the building, she held her breath in anxious expectation.

Slowly, slowly, she hears the rumble of the procession approaching; the cries grow louder and louder; the fierce shouts of the angry populace fill her with terror; but still she waits with a patience surely above human powers. And now the herald stands before her. She reads the words upon the sacred title which he bears: "The King of the Jews," her King and her Son. Suddenly a cross appears, and then, for one instant, which seemed a year of agony, she saw the figure of Jesus staggering under His load.

Quickly she pulls aside the veil which had hidden her face, and, straining her eyes, she beheld the face of her Son. One long look, which told more than volumes could hold; and then, oh, horrible sight! He stumbles, He totters to His knees, He falls to the ground, and the Cross falls with Him upon His almost lifeless body.

"O all ye that pass by the way attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow. . . . To whom shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem, for thy grief is great as the sea and who is there who can comfort thee?" St. John and the pious women gather around her as she sinks fainting into their arms.

For a while Jesus remains there upon the ground moaning, moaning, not only because of His weakness and the terrible weight of the Cross which oppressed Him, but moaning because He saw that His Mother's heart was broken. Someone from the crowd, stricken with the horror of the sight, exclaimed to the soldiers: "That poor Man is dying. Have you no eyes to see?" The soldiers quickly realized that, unless they found someone to help Him to carry His burden, He certainly would die on the way. So they looked around and they saw approaching at a little distance a workman on his way from the fields. He had taken no part in the brutal scenes we have just witnessed, but had gone as usual in the morning to his work in the country, and now, returning weary from his morning's work, he beheld this terrible spectacle before his eyes.

He hurried towards the crowd, and, as he saw this poor

victim prostrate on the pavement, his heart was deeply touched and he began to protest to the soldiers against such cruelty. "Oh, well, then," said they, "we will press you into service. Come, take your place here, lift the Cross and help the Prisoner to carry it towards Golgotha." In vain he tried to get away. They seized him forcibly and, putting the lower part of the Cross into his hands, and the upper part upon the shoulders of Christ, again risen from the pavement, they ordered the procession to move forward.

While this was going on, Jesus turned His pallid face towards Simon, and the look which came from those eyes conquered the repugnance which had seized him, and, willingly taking up the Cross with Jesus, he followed Him. And as he followed, step by step, along the bitter road towards Calvary, the grace of God flooded his heart; and he knew by some mystic inspiration of grace that he had been accorded, in the designs of God, a place in the story of the tragic Passion of His Son. Until the end of time the name of Simon of Cyrene will be mentioned by the children of men in gratitude and benediction.

The Sixth Station

And now again the procession begins to move up the hill towards the Porta Antiqua. Traces of this road are still preserved. It is called by the Arabs "el alam," that is, "The Street of Sorrows." Schick, the archæologist, in his explorations along both sides of this road, found there, still existing, many remnants of the old Jewish houses built before the Romans had taken Jerusalem.

The buildings along this road were many times demolished and destroyed at the time of the various attacks and sieges of Jerusalem, but nevertheless there still are the signs of the ancient road over which passed the sad procession towards Calvary.

Every Friday over this same road passes a procession of pious pilgrims, led by the Franciscans, and the road is forever sanctified by the prayers and the meditations of thousands upon thousands of holy men and women who, following the footsteps of Our Blessed Lord, have passed over this sacred way.

Although this road was one of the principal streets of the city, still it was very narrow and dirty, as nearly all such streets are everywhere in the Orient. Crowded as it was with an immense multitude as Jesus passed along this rough road, the very air became fetid and hot, so that it was difficult even to breathe, as He slowly wended His way towards the gate of the city.

The centurion from time to time commanded the crowd to make way and give more room, and the crowd answered back with insults and imprecations. Like every mob, it was difficult to manage, even by the soldiers. The high priests and the Pharisees advanced along the way with the pride of conquerors. Their faces were aglow with victory. Here just behind them, safe and secure in their hands, at last was the hated Galilean.

Meanwhile, almost unnoticed by the crowd, the heavens began to take on a menacing appearance, and the sun, now advancing towards the meridian, gave forth a sickly light. The heat was oppressive and the air stifling.

The dust of the streets raised by the shuffling of the multitude and by the passage of the horses made it almost impossible to breathe. And so Jesus stood for a moment gasping, trying to gather His forces to go on — but look!

On the left-hand side of the street suddenly a door opens and out upon the highway appears the noble figure of a matron. Her face is veiled but she bears herself fearlessly, and with resolute step she makes her way through the crowd, passes through the midst of the soldiers, and suddenly kneels at the feet of Jesus.

Struck with surprise at this bold action on the part of a woman, the crowd stops and holds its breath expectant. From the folds of her robe she draws forth a linen napkin or towel, and offering it to Jesus she murmurs a prayer: "O Lord, O my Lord, my Master, make me worthy to wipe Thy Sacred Face." Silently Jesus took with His left hand the cloth held up to Him and laid it for an instant over His bleeding countenance. It was all the work of a minute, and it all passed so quickly that even the guards had no time to interfere. The very hurriedness and surprise of this good woman in her deed of mercy and love towards her Master were the best guarantee of its success.

For a moment the crowd looked on with curious eyes, somewhat touched by this moving spectacle, but the Pharisees, mounted on their horses, drove through the crowd, dispersing them hither and thither, fearful that the gentle and kindly deed of this good woman would serve to arouse sympathy and compassion for Jesus on the part of the multitude. They shouted to the soldiers

to urge the Master along, and, turning to the woman, they bade her depart at once. Hurriedly she rises to her feet, and into her trembling hands Jesus delivered the linen cloth with which He had wiped His face. Then, turning to give one last tender look towards the Victim staggering under the load of His Cross, she turned and fled into the house again.

Once there, away from the annoyance of the soldiers and the agitated voices of the rabble, she took from under her cloak the linen cloth with which Christ had wiped His Sacred Countenance. Again and again she kissed it and bathed it with her tears. It was to her the symbol of the tenderness of her heart towards the Master in the hour of His deepest grief. She told herself she would keep it as long as she lived, and that she would prize it during her whole life as a precious thing which had touched the bleeding face of the Master. And as she stood gazing at it with these thoughts running through her mind, she opened the folds of the linen cloth and, oh, wonder of wonders! there traced upon the towel were the lineaments of the face of Jesus.

There were the eyes, even through the blood and the tears, looking out at her with gratitude amid the sadness of His suffering. There lining the cheeks was the Sacred Blood bathing them as it fell. Overwhelmed by the miracle and trembling with emotion at the sight of the impress of that Sacred Countenance, she fell upon her knees, and, holding it up before her, she saluted it with all the veneration of her heart as a sacred inheritance of the love of Jesus.

So the Divine Master, even on His way to death, was mindful and grateful for the kindly act of a good woman, and left the sacred treasure of the impress of His Divine Countenance as a testimony, to the end of time, of her thoughtfulness and His gratitude.

This, then, is the origin of what has been known ever since as the "Sacred Face."

Veronica and the Sacred Face

Naturally we are curious to know who was this courageous and kind-hearted woman. What was her name and her story?

This holy woman has been generally known by the name of Veronica, but various writers of high authority claim that her real name was Berenice in Greek, which, changed into the Latin form, became Veronica, from popular usage.

It is the opinion of others that the word "Veronica" is a compound word formed by the union of the two simple words "verum" and "icon," that is, "true image." In that case the word "Veronica" would signify properly the figure of the Sacred Face left upon the towel, and so, by metonymy, the name would pass from the object to the possessor.

That at various times the linen cloth with the image of the Sacred Face was called "Veronica" is beyond doubt. For instance, we find in the Ordo Romanus of the year 1143 that the linen cloth is called unequivocally "Veronica." Again in several ancient missals, among them those formerly in use in Germany, printed about the year 1555,

there is a Mass of the Holy Face, or Veronica. In the time of Innocent III in Rome, some medals were coined having on one side the Sacred Face, which were called the Veronicas.

There are, too, some authors who recognize in the woman of this incident the one whom Jesus cured of the flow of blood by the simple touch of His garments. Eusebius of Cæsarea makes frequent mention of this woman. He narrates that in her gratitude she had a bronze statue erected representing the figure of her Divine Healer. He says that the name of the woman healed by Christ was Berenice. He does not, however, state that she was the same one who obtained from Christ the impression of His Sacred Countenance.

And so, though the identity of the person is not exactly clear, the fact itself is perfectly well attested by authentic tradition.

That there is no word of this woman or her action in the writings of the Evangelists proves nothing contrary to this fact. It was not their intention, and this they state expressly, to describe every single incident along the way of the Sacred Passion. In fact, we are oftentimes filled with amazement at the holy reticence with which they described the sufferings of Our Blessed Lord. Tradition further relates that this woman left Jerusalem soon after the death of Christ and traveled to Rome, by the way of the island of Zante. [Anyone desirous of following out the whole story may be referred to the annals of Baronius or the Commentaries of Cornelius a Lapide.]

It is certain that immediately after the death of Christ

the fame of everything concerning Him spread like wildfire all over the Roman Empire. Pilate, in his report to the Emperor Tiberius, narrated, not only the fact of Christ's condemnation, but also that of the wonderful spread of His doctrine. The authenticity of this report of Pilate to Tiberius is established beyond doubt. St. Justin, in his letter to the Emperor Antoninus, the year 150, refers very clearly and unmistakably to this report of Pilate, and Tertullian makes very clear mention of it in his "Apologeticus." So, too, does Eusebius in his "Ecclesiastical History," and many others bear witness to the same fact.

According also to authentic tradition, the Emperor sent a reliable messenger into Palestine to gather information regarding the story of Jesus, and especially regarding Christ's miracles, with the hope that he, too, suffering from a very grave infirmity, might obtain a cure. This messenger, having heard of the Image of the Sacred Face, visited the holy woman who possessed it and besought her to go with it to Rome, when he learned of the many miracles which had been wrought by it in Jerusalem, especially the healing of the sick. The holy woman went with the sacred image to the imperial capitol, and, being led before the Roman Emperor, she showed to him the sacred linen with the impression of Christ's countenance upon it.

The tradition goes on to say that, at the sight of this sacred image, Tiberius was instantly cured, and that it was on account of this miracle, by which he himself recovered his health, that he proposed to the Roman Senate

to number Jesus among the gods of Rome. Of all this both Tertullian and Eusebius tell us in no uncertain terms. The Senate, however, opposed this proposition of the Emperor, and, whatever were the good intentions of Tiberius, certainly the Christians of that day must have felt relieved by the act of the Senate, because in that way the difference was made clear between the Divinity of Christ and the false divinity of the Roman idols. Tiberius, it is true, did not insist upon having his way with the Senate. Nevertheless, he did place an image of Christ among his own "lares," or domestic gods.

Veronica, her mission thus fulfilled, started to return to Jerusalem, but on the way she heard of the terrible persecution of the first Christians in Palestine and she learned that many of the friends of Jesus had been driven into exile, among them Martha, the Magdalen, and Lazarus. She finally took up her abode near Bordeaux in France and died in that country. French tradition, which goes back even to the time of St. Gregory of Tours, verifies all this. In fact it fits in very well with all that we know of the traditions of that time.

The linen cloth itself, upon which Jesus left the impression of His holy face, is preserved to this day in Rome in the chapel erected in one of the great central piers sustaining the dome of St. Peter's and, from time to time, it is still exhibited to the veneration of the faithful. It is said that the image, after the lapse of so many centuries, has become rather faded; but the fact is narrated that on the sixth of January, 1849, while the sacred relic was

being exposed to the faithful, it suddenly glowed with a new light, and resembled very much the pictures which we now venerate as copies of the one in the chapel of St. Helena. [Anyone wishing further to follow up the story of this sacred relic may consult the learned Piazza in his famous work "Emerologio di Roma."]

Station the Seventh — The Second Fall

After thus leaving the impress of His Sacred Countenance upon the linen cloth offered Him by this holy woman, Jesus began again His sad progress towards Golgotha. Again from the meditations of many holy souls we gather that the insults and injuries, already described, which the rabble and the Pharisees had inflicted on Jesus were all renewed, and we are told that by this time even the little children took up the fierce cry against the Master Who had so loved them.

We may well imagine what a blow this last proof of desertion brought to His tender heart, but the corruption of the elders makes itself felt always and everywhere, down through the ranks, even to the little ones themselves. Children, after all, are close imitators of what they see. These children saw that the elders among the people, and their own parents, had joined the crowd and were filling the air with angry shouts. Doubtless the little children scarcely realized what was going on. They merely ran along with the others and added to the din and to the noise with their childish yells. None the less, Our Blessed Lord realized that these poor little children had quickly forgotten His words of tenderness and His deeds of kindness,

and He saw, alas! how quickly the example of the elders could lead the children utterly astray.

Step by step He staggered on until finally He reached the gate of the city. Once more the crowding and crushing which were experienced at the time when Christ left the piazza of the prætorium were renewed. And there, utterly overcome by fatigue and by contemplation of the horrors about Him, again the sacred body of the Divine Master fell to earth.

Once more it seemed as if the end had suddenly come. The soldiers, realizing this, stooped down and lifting up the body of the Master began to carry Him towards Calvary.

And so Jesus goes out through the gate of the Holy City. Never again would He enter its portals. He had loved it and had wept over it. Now, since all His tenderness had been returned with abuse, He would go out of it and the city would see Him no more. Yet until the end of time every portion of Jerusalem would resound with His voice and show forth the grace of His Sacred Presence.

The prætorium was now deserted. Pilate sat there pensive and alone, and ever and anon before his eyes arose the vision of the Ecce Homo. The public squares were deserted, and, as the population went out through the gate, crowding after the sad cortège, the streets of the city were emptied. Already had begun the final desolation.

The Eighth Station

From the Porta Antiqua the road divided into three different streets. The one on the right, leading to the

north, followed along the walls of the city until it came to another street issuing from the gate of Ephraim, and leading towards Samaria and Galilee. The one on the left, leading to the south, ran between the city walls and the hill of Calvary. The middle one wound towards the west, ascending towards Gareb. On the left was Golgotha, on the right was a series of gardens, one of which was the property of Joseph of Arimathea, and in which later was placed the dead body of Jesus. The hill of Calvary, therefore, stood between these two latter roads which surrounded it, and from either of them one could climb up the hill of Golgotha.

The road which tradition points to as the one over which Christ was led on His way to Calvary was the road to the south. From this road the ascent to Calvary is quite steep, and it must have presented to the weary limbs of Our Blessed Lord a most difficult task. There at the foot of the hill, as He turned from the main road to begin the ascent, had gathered a crowd of kind-hearted women and little children. At the sight of the figure of Jesus, bowed with grief and overcome with suffering, these good women began to weep, and disregarding the rebukes of the guard they spoke to Our Blessed Lord words of consolation and comfort.

It was forbidden to show any signs of commiseration to condemned prisoners, but no law will ever be able to constrain the tender pity of the heart of a good woman. As they realized that all this suffering was caused by hatred and jealousy, and knowing well the holy character of the Prophet and how utterly innocent He was of all

the charges laid at His door, they could restrain themselves no longer, and above the insults of the mob arose the plaintive cry and lamentation of this little company of good women. Jesus stood for an instant and turned His tender eyes towards the little group, and in them they read the signs of understanding and gratitude. And then above the suppressed wailing were heard these touching words coming from the trembling lips of the Master: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children, for behold the day shall come wherein they shall say: 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck.' Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: 'Fall upon us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us,' for if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"

Once before Christ had prophesied the end of Jerusalem, on the occasion of His solemn entrance into the Holy City only six days ago. But now, while His eyes were filled with tender compassion as they saw the little group of good women before Him, His voice took on the stern accents of the Prophet who reveals the terrible judgment of the anger of God. The measure of that wrath is almost full and the vengeance of God is nigh. Christ, looking at the walls of the Holy City, saw them already surrounded by the armies of Vespasian and of Titus. He saw the horrible slaughter of the Jewish people; He saw the horrors of civil war and its baneful consequences, famine and disease; He heard the wail of the children in vain asking for bread, and the cry of the mothers who lamented that

they had ever given birth to children who would thus be obliged to suffer before their eyes; He heard the cry of the combatants as they rushed through the breaches in the walls; He saw the flames lapping the roof of the temple and the gleam of the cruel swords which, right and left, inflicted mortal wounds and cut their way down to an awful victory.

The vision of all these horrors passed quickly before the mind of the Master. He was deeply touched by the tender goodness of this little group, but His mind quickly passed over them and beheld the terrible vision of an angry God avenging the Blood of His Divine Son. "Weep not for Me, weep for yourselves and for your children, for if this happen in the green wood, what will happen in the dry?" He meant by this to say: "If I, Who am utterly and completely innocent of sin and of crime, am thus dealt with for the sins of others, what will not become of you whose hearts have become so dried up as to feel no touch of the mercy of God?" Bossuet well observes that the Divine Master by these words does not intend to manifest any lack of gratitude on His part to the good women for their compassion, but in speaking to them He speaks to the whole world, and He says to all of us: "It is not sufficient to have compassion upon My sufferings, but you must show pity to your own souls by repenting of the sins you have committed."

And thus this tender scene of the meeting of Jesus with the good women at the foot of Calvary is a lesson, not only to them, but to all the world, to realize that emotion, even when good, in itself is not enough, unless it reaches

to the reality of things, and moves, not merely our tears in compassion, but our hearts in sorrow and repentance for any evil we have done.

The Ninth Station

Onward the sad procession moves slowly and wearily up the hill of Golgotha. Each new step is an added torture. The ascent becomes more and more difficult. Even with the aid of Simon and the soldiers, Jesus is compelled to strain His utmost energy and effort to reach the top. At last He gained the summit of the hill, and then came the terrible reaction. He stands for a moment, His heart almost is bursting from the enormous effort, His brain reels, He closes His eyes, and then suddenly every muscle relaxes and down He falls for the third time upon the ground.

Tradition records clearly these three falls of Our Blessed Lord during the journey from the prætorium to the top of Golgotha: once in the lower part of the city, once at the gate, and the last time at the top of Calvary. St. Bridget in her Revelations on the Passion asserts that Jesus fell several times during His sad journey, and Cardinal Bellarmine, a man of undoubtedly great scholarship, gave credence to these Revelations of St. Bridget.

And now the top of the hill finally reached, Simon of Cyrene was rudely dismissed. He had accomplished the task assigned him by the soldiers, and so he was roughly pushed aside, and went out from the sad company of the Master into the crowd. But Simon had already felt deep down in his heart the solemn conviction that this Victim

of the hatred and jealousy of these infamous men was in reality the Messias. He was driven by the soldiers away from any further, immediate contact with Jesus, but as he stood there among the crowd the grace of God was working in his soul, and until the end of his days he never ceased to thank God for the grace He had given him in standing so close to His Divine Son and of sharing in a small way the burden of His Sacred Cross.

CHAPTER XIII

GOLGOTHA

The hill upon which the final scene of Christ's Passion took place is commonly called "Golgotha" from a corruption of the Hebrew word "Gulgoleth," which in English means a skull, and so in Latin "Calva," and from that was derived the name Calvary. A well-authenticated tradition places at the foot of this hill the burial place of Adam, and so, above the tomb of him who brought death and sin into the world, Jesus was exalted upon the throne of the Cross by which the sins of man would be forgiven. Origen thus speaks clearly of this tradition: "It has come to me by tradition that the body of the first man, Adam, was buried where Christ was crucified"; and Tertullian writes thus: "Tradition holds that here was buried the first man. Here Christ suffered, and the Sacred Blood of the Divine Victim bathed the earth," so that the dust of the old Adam, mixed with the blood of Christ, became purified by the cleansing water of forgiveness. Again St. Epiphanius, who was born in Palestine, and who was a keen student of the Christian tradition of his time, thus writes: "From the records of books we have learned that Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on Golgotha, that is, in that place precisely where lay the body of Adam." This tradition thus clearly indicated was also accepted and professed by St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Cyril, and

many other eminent writers both of ancient and modern times.

At the foot of many crucifixes we see a figure of a skull and cross-bones. Now this representation is nothing more than a continuation of this tradition concerning the burial place of Adam and the place of the altar of the Cross. À Lapide clearly indicates that this is the meaning of the skull usually found at the foot of the crucifix both in sculpture and in painting.

Even in our own day, the Greek schismatics show the pilgrims to the Holy Land the grotto in the rock, which is considered, even to this day, to be the burial place of Adam.

Notwithstanding this well-defined tradition, there are several writers of considerable note who do not accept it, among them Ollivier, Meistermann, Zanecchia, and others. These writers, following the authority of St. Jerome, reject the ancient tradition. But it must be said, in simple truth, that notwithstanding the apparent opposition of St. Jerome to the old tradition, according to every rule of sane criticism, it would appear practically beyond doubt that this tradition is by far more tenable and more reliable than the dubious deductions of these modern writers. In passing, let us briefly turn our attention to the words of St. Jerome, cited as support for this modern view. We find them in the commentary of St. Matthew thus: "If anyone wishes to hold that Christ was crucified on Calvary so that His blood might bathe the sepulchre of Adam, I would ask him why, therefore, were the thieves crucified

on the same spot? It would appear from this that Calvary does not signify the sepulchre of the first man, but the place of the beheaded ones."

Now it is not clear from these words that St. Jerome denies that here was the tomb of Adam. In fact, the words would indicate that he took that for granted, and he affirms only that the name of Calvary was not derived from the word indicating the skull of the first man, but rather that it was named from the place of beheading. Surely there is no clear reason for deducing from these words of St. Jerome an opinion opposite to ancient tradition.

As a matter of fact, St. Jerome himself, in a letter to Marcella, clearly indicates his acceptance of the ancient tradition as correct, for he writes that Adam lived and died in this city of Jerusalem. His words are: "In this city [Jerusalem] it is said that Adam lived and died. Hence the site of the Crucifixion of our Lord is called Calvary because there was buried the skull of the first man so that the blood of the second Adam, dropping from the Cross upon the earth, might wipe away the sins of the first Adam."

St. Jerome in another place affirms that among the dead who arose and entered into Jerusalem after the death of Christ was also Adam. It is clear from this that St. Jerome really held that the body of Adam had been buried near the sacred city.

The Cross

The origin of the cross as a mode of torture and death comes down to us from prehistoric times. From the Far

East, from the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, this form of punishment spread through Asia into Egypt, thence to Greece and Italy, as we learn from Herodotus and Thucydides. We have from the writings of Quintus Curtius the story that Alexander the Great at the siege of Tyre condemned two thousand prisoners of war to be put to death upon crosses raised along the seashore. Josephus Flavius tells us that, during the siege of Jerusalem under Titus, the Roman soldiers seized those escaping from the horrors of the city and put them to death by crucifixion. So numerous were these victims, that all around the city like a horrible grove arose thousands of crosses with a writhing victim upon each. Although we find no mention in the Mosaic law of this particular kind of punishment, nevertheless, in later times the Jews adopted it as a death penalty. In fact, Josephus Flavius narrates that Alexander, the King of the Asmoneans, put to death by crucifixion eight hundred of the principal rebels. We see, therefore, that even among the Orientals crucifixion was well known as a death penalty.

There was this difference, however, between the crucifixion among the Hebrews and that among the pagans; the Hebrew custom demanded that the bones of the victim upon the cross should be broken so that death would ensue the same day as the crucifixion, whereas the Romans and the Greeks generally allowed the crucified to languish upon the cross and then to remain there even after death as a sign of terror to all who passed by the way. It was a common thing to allow the birds of the air, scavengers like the crows, to destroy bit by bit every

vestige of the victim. This is what Plautus means when he says ironically to his slaves: "My sepulchre will be the birds."

This practice, however, of leaving the victim upon the cross until all the remains were consumed by scavengers was not an absolute law or a fixed custom among the pagans, because we know from the testimony of Cicero that the Romans also occasionally followed this custom of the breaking of the limbs, called by them "crurifragium."

The Form of the Cross

The form of the cross was substantially always the same. It is true, however, that in some cases, as in Egypt, the victim was suspended from the branches of a tree. In other places, the form of the cross was that known as the cross of St. Andrew, that is in the form of the letter X. Nevertheless, the common and ordinary form of the cross was that of a vertical beam with a transversal beam near the top.

In some cases the transversal was simply laid upon the top of the vertical beam, in the form of the letter T. At other times the transversal beam was inserted in the vertical beam a little below the top or the head.

From this arose a discussion as to what particular form the cross of the Master was, whether, as the Latins said, it was the "crux commissa," that is the T cross, or the "crux immissa," the Latin cross with its transversal beam inserted below the head of the vertical beam. There are excellent authorities on either side of this controversy. Some of the Fathers of the Church are quoted in favor of

the "crux commissa," or the T form cross, but, if one observes closely, they speak rather of the symbolism of the cross than of its exact form. In fact, both of these opinions can be easily reconciled, and, as a matter of fact, they were harmonized by Innocent III, who at the time of the Fourth Council of the Lateran expressed the opinion that the Cross of Christ was originally the "crux commissa," but that, when above the Cross had been placed the wooden attachment bearing the title, it then assumed the form of the "crux immissa."

This opinion had a most unexpected confirmation in the discovery made on the Palatine Hill in Rome, in the year 1856. In the work of excavating the ruins on the south side of the Palatine, the barracks of the prætorian guard were discovered, and on the walls were still clearly visible many designs and scratchings evidently made by the soldiers while waiting for duty in the barracks. Now, among these different designs and scratchings, graffiti, as they are called, was found one which was of such decided importance that it was cut out of the wall and brought for conservation to the Kircherian Museum at the Roman College, where to-day it is still found.

In the graffiti we see the figure of a man having the head of an ass bound to the cross. The form of the cross is the "crux immissa," but it is plainly visible that the head of the cross is not the continuation of the vertical upright because it does not follow the same line. Rather it is clear that it is a part of a beam added to the upright above the transversal. Now this is precisely the idea of Innocent III, as already described. At the left of the cross,

standing on the ground, is the figure of a man who looks up towards the figure upon the cross, and as he contemplates the crucified Victim he holds out his hand in the way of an "orante," that is, a Christian believer in the act of adoration, and across the wall is scratched this inscription: "Alexamenos sebete theon" — "Alexamenos adores God." The archæologists place the graffiti at the end of the second or the beginning of the third century.

The meaning of the blasphemous graffiti is perfectly clear. It is well known that, even from the time of St. Paul, the Christians had penetrated into the palace of the Cæsars itself, and the Christian faith was accepted by many of those surrounding the Emperor. One of the calumnies against the Christians was that they adored the head of an ass. The meaning of this calumny is clear; that, first, the Crucified One received the adoration of the Christians as God; that, secondly, Christ, according to the pagan Romans, was a stupid and crazy visionary. And this scratching on the wall of the palace of the Cæsars clearly indicates the ribald joke of some prætorian at the expense of one of his fellow guards. Here clearly, therefore, is a mute witness of the fact that the Christian faith had entered even the imperial palace, and that the prime article of that faith was the recognition of the Divinity of Christ. The graffiti is, moreover, as we see from the drawing itself, a proof that the form of the cross was the form of the letter T, with the addition of an extra beam above the head. How many things of tremendous critical importance from a bit of accidental joking! Irreverent

blasphemy can still be the clearest possible testimony of a great historic truth!

The crosses erected for the death penalty of a prisoner were sometimes fixed and sometimes movable. Among the Romans and the Greeks it was the custom to oblige the condemned man to bear his cross through the city, and then, at the end of the journey, to fix it in the earth and bind the victim to it.

But it was also the custom to place at some point outside the large cities a permanent cross, which was a sign of terror to the disorderly, just as in later times the guillotine was a permanent fixture, the very sight of which drove terror into the hearts of the beholders.

The fixed or permanent crosses were more solid and larger in size; and generally there was attached to this sort of cross the pegma, which served as a sort of resting place for the feet of the victim. At other times this support took the form of a seat, which helped to support the weight of the crucified. And in this way we understand the meaning of the Latin phrase: "inequitare in cruce." St. Irenæus and Tertullian, both of whom had assisted at different times at the crucifixion of condemned prisoners, record this particular form of the cross. Now, the Greeks and the Romans, who allowed the victim to remain upon the cross until he died, were more accustomed to attach this seat to the cross than the Hebrews, who finished the dreadful work shortly after the crucifixion itself. It is clear from this, that on the Cross of Our Blessed Lord there was no seat, and this is made clear by universal and

constant tradition. The support for the feet, however, we have good reason to believe was fixed to the Cross of Jesus. St. Gregory of Tours clearly indicates this, and the graffiti of the Palatine, already described, shows clearly that there was no seat, but there was at the foot of the crucifix a resting place for the feet of Christ.

The crosses usually carried by the victims were not very high, certainly not so high as mediæval painters are accustomed to depict in the scene of the Crucifixion. The victim was raised only a few feet above the ground. We know this from the fact that often wild beasts came in the night to devour the bodies hanging on the cross. It is true that the general custom was to erect higher crosses for more distinguished victims, but that this was not done in the case of Jesus is clear from the fact that when St. Helena, in the year 325, discovered the three crosses on Calvary she could not then and there decide which was the true cross upon which our Saviour died, as all three of them were of similar construction. Moreover, the title had been torn from the Cross and was found in a separate place. It was only by a miracle that the true Cross was finally distinguished from the other two. Rufinus in his "Ecclesiastical History," and Socrates in his historical accounts, both narrate that, following the advice of Bishop Macarius, a sign was asked from Heaven to enable them to have sure evidence of the authentic Cross of Jesus. One by one the three crosses were touched to the body of a noble lady of Jerusalem who lay at the point of death. The contact with the first and the second crosses brought no

results, but when the third Cross touched her, suddenly she opened her eyes, stood upon her feet, and, completely restored to health, ran about the room glorifying God. St. Cyril of Jersualem, writing to the Emperor Constantius, speaks clearly of the miracles wrought by the true Cross in the time of his father, the great Constantine.

We may conclude, therefore, that the form of the three crosses was similar. Indeed, it was the intention of the Jews, by crucifying Our Blessed Lord between two thieves, to make it appear that He was in no way different from them, of the same class of criminals.

The Manner of Crucifixion

The victims to be crucified were first stripped of their clothing, and thus naked were affixed to the cross. We learn from the writings of the ancients that at times the victims were bound by ropes to the cross. Such was generally the method followed in Egypt, as we learn from Xenophon of Ephesus. But the Roman custom was to affix the victim to the wood by nails, a nail in each hand and in each foot. It was also customary to bind the abdomen so as in some way to constrain the convulsions of the victim. Pliny refers to this cord as the "spartum," which was supposed to have some magical influence in quieting the victim's tortures.

Since every detail of Christ's suffering is a matter of supreme importance to us, we go on to ask, How was Our Blessed Lord nailed to the Cross? There were two customs with regard to this painful and awful penalty. One was to lay the cross upon the ground. The victim was

stretched upon it and nailed to it, then cross and victim were lifted upright. The cross was then thrust into a little opening in the ground made ready to receive it. This we know on the authority of St. Pionius of Smyrna and also from the words of Firmicus Maternus. The other method was that of raising the cross alone and then affixing the victim to it. Plautus speaks of this method in his comedy "Mostellaria." Without going further into these brutal details, which show clearly the horrible cruelty of the times, the question may be asked, Which method was used in the case of the Crucifixion of Jesus?

It seems clear beyond doubt, from all that we read concerning this sad event, that the Cross of Our Blessed Lord was laid upon the ground and that there He was nailed to it. This is the opinion of both ancient and modern writers on the subject: St. Barnabas, Ludolf, St. Bonaventure, Ollivier, and Le Camus.

The Sufferings of the Crucifixion

As may well be imagined, the torture endured by this barbarous method of inflicting death was simply indescribable. And still, as we know from the description of those who had witnessed these dreadful sights, at times, the victim lived not only for hours, but for days. It is nothing short of wonderful the amount of suffering and torture which the human frame seems able to endure. While we are horrified at the brutality of such mode of torture, we must endeavor the better to realize all that Our Blessed Lord underwent for our Redemption; we must try to face at least a brief consideration of the suffer-

ings He endured at this final moment of His Passion. The nails, rough and large, affixed both hands and feet to the wood of the cross. The blood of the victim gushed forth from the wounds. The more delicate the feeling of the victim, naturally the greater the torture. Naked, he was exposed to the inclemency of the weather. He was overcome with an indescribable weakness on account of the loss of so much blood. A burning fever seized him, creating an insatiable thirst. No wonder Cicero calls crucifixion the most cruel and the blackest of torments. It was a penalty generally reserved either for slaves, who were not even considered to be men; or for criminals of the very worst class — the outcasts of society. It was such a shameful form of death that no Roman citizen was ever thus condemned, and among the Hebrews one who was crucified was called the accursed of God. (Deuteronomy xxi, 23.)

"The miserable man condemned to this awful torture," writes Staffer in his work on Palestine, "remained there screaming and yelling in a horrible voice, thus indicating the torture that he underwent. Some of those among the crowd about the Cross had seen this form of death sentence carried out so often that they had become indifferent. Others there were who showed their open hostility. The passers-by insulted him; the urchins of the street stoned him; and thus, hour upon hour followed in bitterest torture. As the night came on, the crowd dwindled away, and the victim, having drunk of the posca, a drugged drink purposely intended to deaden all sensibility, became stupefied, hopelessly awaiting the moment that

would bring death. When the morning came, death did not often come with it, and the passers-by still heard the moaning from the cross and passed quickly by, paying no attention to it. Such was death by crucifixion! In all the annals of human cruelty there is nothing so terrible. History knows nothing more atrocious and the human beast could conceive nothing worse."

Besides all these indescribable bodily sufferings, there was added the infamy which it brought to the name of the crucified and to all his family and relations. It was an indelible stigma of infamy and of opprobrium.

To such a penalty the Son of God was condemned, and such a penalty He accepted and underwent even to the last detail of horrible suffering and torture, that by His sacrifice He might blot out the sins of men. He Who knew no sin made Himself the victim of sin, so that in Him we should become just according to the justice of God. (II Corinthians v, 21.)

Oh, inscrutable abyss of divine justice and divine mercy! How can we ever repay with all our love the greatness of the love of Christ for us, which urged Him to undergo such punishment for our sins?

CHAPTER XIV

THE CRUCIFIXION

St. Mark, speaking of the time of the Crucifixion, says: "It was the third hour and they crucified Him." (St. Mark xv, 25.) Thus, laconically, the Evangelist records this terrible penalty of the Crucifixion of Christ. But in those few words how much is contained? It was the purpose of the Evangelists to record exactly the facts and thus to leave an authentic historical document for all posterity. But in those few words we have food for years of meditation and contemplation. For so many pious souls who have given their lives to the consideration of the sacred mystery of Christ's Passion, each word is a book full to overflowing with matter for pious thought.

St. Mark, in saying that it was the third hour when they crucified Jesus, signifies that the sixth hour had not yet begun; that is, the hour beginning at midday and ending in the middle of the afternoon. But midday, which marked the end of the third hour and the beginning of the sixth hour, evidently was not very far off.

A guard prevented the rabble, during the preparation for the erection of the Cross, from coming too near the scene. The Pharisees and the members of the Sanhedrim were allowed to enter within the circle about the Cross. They were eager to see that the judgment was carried out to the letter. The soldiers allowed them to

pass the cordon, and they gathered around the Cross with cruel faces to be witnesses to the end.

Making their way little by little through the crowd, silently weeping as they approached the top of the hill, was a little group of women. Love was urging them on and on, and they wished to be as near as possible to Him Who was their All. The Mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, stood out in front of the little group, and around her gathered her sister, Mary of Cleophas, Salome, Susanna, the Magdalen, Martha, and a few others. Near Our Blessed Lady could be seen the youthful but sorrowful figure of St. John, who, from now until the bitter end, stood by as a prop to the Mother of Jesus. Restraining as best they could the bitter tears that welled forth from their eyes, they looked on at the dreadful scene. When, at last, the Cross was raised on high and the cordon of soldiers removed, they crept quickly up to the foot of the Cross and there stood beside it.

Around about the sides of the hill and in the valley below thousands of spectators had gathered. Beyond on the walls of the city and on the roofs of the houses a multitude looked across to Golgotha to behold the dread spectacle.

Not all of them were moved by hatred and jealousy. There were some among that crowd with human hearts, and though they dared not manifest their aversion to all this injustice and cruelty, still they felt deeply the horror and the infamy of the whole situation. Then there were, as usual, the curiosity-seekers, the noisy rabble, the "profanum vulgus," who shift with every

wind that blows and who are ever ready, as the impulse seizes them, to applaud or to put to death those whose true worth they never really understand. Of course, it is always the clever propagandists who are chiefly to blame for the insensate and variable emotions of the rabble. Nevertheless, the mob itself is guilty, for, without knowing at all the reason, the mobs acquiesce in the strategy of those who are more clever than they, and follow blindly in the wake of those who lead them. Five days ago these people had cried out: "O King of Israel, blessed art Thou Who comest in the name of the Lord!" and to-day they take up the cry of the Pharisees and stain their hands in the innocent blood of the Son of God.

Yet in the midst of all their stupid fury, doubtless at the bottom of their souls there was still this thought: "We have seen Him perform so many wonderful signs, what if now He again works even a greater wonder?" Indeed, while they were intent upon putting Him to death, they were secretly expectant of some new indication of His divine power. Could He not, like Gedeon, suddenly break the chains that bound Him, disappear from the midst of His persecutors, and with a breath disperse the Philistines about Him? Even the priests and the members of the Sanhedrim could scarcely conceal at times the fact that they, too, were conscious of an interior apprehension. To bury these fears in their souls, they only sought to hasten the more the preparations for the final sacrifice.

All about them, in the sky above and in the very air they breathed, they felt the indications of a revulsion

of nature itself. They heard the rumble of distant thunder beyond the hills. A heavy and murky fog blotted out the clear rays of the sun and spread a sickly glamour over the whole country about. Something seemed about to happen and terror began to possess their souls, but it was the terror of the madman who only rushes more fiercely towards destruction. So they only yelled the louder to the soldiers to hurry up, to end it all, to finish forever the memory of this hated Galilean.

From the words of St. John (XIX, 23) it is clear that four soldiers had been counted off to look after the Crucifixion of Jesus. It is hard to believe that these soldiers were of the Roman Legion, for as a rule the legionaries were men of considerable pride, partaking as they did in the glory of the great Roman conquests. But as Pilate had no lictors in his train, it became necessary to delegate for this disagreeable task some of the soldiery.

It is just possible that these soldiers, to whom had been assigned this repulsive work, were not Romans, in the strict sense of the word, but were some of those barbarous tribes who from time to time were recruited into the ranks as supplementary to the legionaries. If that were the case, then we can understand readily that this bloody work had no very special repulsion for them. We can see them handling brutally the tender and wounded body of Our Blessed Lord; we can see these rough barbarians throwing Him upon the Cross and there driving the nails through His sacred hands and feet; we can hear them as they dig away the cavity into which the Cross would be dropped so as to be held more securely by the

earth; we can hear the sound of their hammers, as they nail the glorious title above the head of Christ; and, in the midst of all these horrors, we can see the gentle Body of Our Blessed Lord; we can see the patient look upon His wounded face; we can hear the tender words, which, even amid the blasphemy of the soldiery, came forth from His sacred lips, and the faint and pathetic cry which even now escaped Him as He moaned: "Thy will, O Father, not Mine, be done."

It was a custom among the Jews to offer to those condemned to death a mixture of liquors and drugs, the effect of which would be to stupefy them in their suffering. The basis of this mixture was a very strong wine, with which were mixed ground incense and myrrh, the whole flavored with orange juice. There is a pious tradition which affirms that the good women who followed Our Blessed Lord to the Cross had gone apart and had mixed for Him a refreshing drink, which, if the opportunity offered itself, they would give to Him to slake His awful thirst. But tradition also has it that, when these good women gave this mixture to the soldiers, they took it away for themselves, and then made a bitter and unpalatable mixture similar to that which they offered to the two thieves who were crucified at the same time. This bitter and disgusting mixture they now offered to Christ. St. Matthew bears witness that when the Master had tasted it He refused to drink it. He wanted no drink that would stupefy Him in His Agony. He would bear the full brunt of all His dreadful sufferings with a perfectly clear brain and a perfectly undulled

nerve. He would bear without assistance all the bitterness of the penalty, and so, while tormented with a most cruel thirst, He accepted this, too, as a part of His Passion.

Christ Despoiled of His Garments

The clothing of one condemned to death belonged, according to Roman law, to the executors of the sentence. Loot and booty were a part of the payment of the soldiers of that time, and it was not to be expected that they would show any delicacy of feeling in this particular case. Booty was booty, and rights were rights; so they hurled themselves upon the Body of Jesus, loosened the chains and the ropes with which He was bound and tore from His sacred body, lacerated with wounds, the garments with which He was clothed. War and conquest had hardened all their sensibilities; they were thoroughly accustomed to scenes like this. Blood had no horrors for them any more, so with rough hands they stripped Jesus of His clothing. All this was accompanied with rude jests and boisterous laughter. Pity and the finer feelings had no place at Golgotha. And, oh, the horror of the spectacle! Jesus, the All Pure and the All Holy, now stood before them stripped and naked, His delicate frame covered from head to foot with cruel wounds and fresh-opened sores. Mary and her gentle companions covered their eyes with their veils. In the midst of a multitude without sense of decency or shame, they felt, as only they could feel, the deepest sympathy and compassion for the Master in this new trial.

Again we must rely upon tradition and the visions conceded to holy souls who have meditated upon the Passion of Christ all their lives to know details about these cruel scenes which the Evangelists pass over in silence. It is said that at this moment, when the soldiers had stripped Our Lord first of His outer robe and then of His inner garments, a man of noble bearing and of fearless countenance stepped forth from the crowd and rapidly walked to where Jesus was standing, trembling from head to foot with the shame of the moment. Drawing from his cloak a clean white cloth, he quickly folded it about the loins of Christ and with a little cord bound it in place. Christ looked with tenderness and gratitude into the face of this new and unknown friend and whispered a gentle word of benediction. Both St. Bridget and Catherine Emmerich describe this scene precisely. They narrate that this man was a distant relative of St. Joseph and was called Jonadab. He had come up from Bethlehem for the Passover, and, meeting there several of his friends from the little village in which Christ had been born, he learned the story of what was taking place; of the condemnation of Jesus and of His sufferings on the way to Golgotha. He joined with the crowd in the streets, and, finally, saw in the crowd, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the other holy women, some of whom he knew at home. When the moment came that Christ was to be exposed before the crowd, he was ready, and by his faith and courage saved Jesus from further shame.

Although it was now full noon, darkness little by little

had overspread the land. There was something suffocating in the very air, and the terrified soldiers urged each other on to finish this whole affair and get back to the city before the threatening storm broke upon them. Quickly, therefore, the soldiers seized Christ, laid Him suddenly down upon the wood of the Cross, and then, quickly stretching either hand as far as it would reach, they drove the nails through the middle of the palm into the wood underneath. Deeper and deeper through flesh and wood went the massive nails until finally the head of the nails was close to the palms. These nails were heavy, strong and rough, made thus purposely, in order that they might support the weight of the body. One of them, found by St. Helena, is venerated in Rome in the Basilica of the Holy Cross. This rough instrument of torture which had pierced the tender Body of the Lord is now preserved in a golden reliquary and is venerated by the faithful from all over the world.

Having nailed the hands to the Cross, the executioners now passed to the nailing of the feet. These they seized roughly and pulled them forcibly down to the place which had been made ready for them. They first nailed one and then the other to the little foot rest at the foot of the Cross, and now the whole body of the Master trembled in a convulsion of horrible pain. The heart beat violently; a quiver of terrible torture ran through every nerve. The lips were shriveled and purple. Still they breathed only words of tenderness and compassion. The head fell almost lifeless to one side, and it seemed as though the end must shortly come.

The Elevation of the Cross

It was the work of only a few minutes to lift the Cross from its place upon the ground. It was not the first time that these barbarous soldiers had witnessed this part of the dreadful work. Quickly one of them held fast the lower end of the Cross, and the others raised it hand over hand until finally it stood erect. The sufferings of the Master during this time were simply indescribable. All four of the soldiers now seized the Cross in their strong arms and bore it quickly to the hole made in the earth to receive it. The impact of the wood against the rocky soil shook the quivering body of Jesus. At last it was in its place. Quickly they buried the foot of the Cross with soil and stones, fixing it firmly in the earth.

At last from all the sides of the hill, from the valley below, from the walls and roofs of the Holy City, the Victim of the sins of all the world was now visible. For a moment the crowd shuddered with horror. A hush fell upon the multitude. Darker and darker grew the heavens and another rumble of distant thunder was heard from beyond the hills. Something awful was happening; something indescribable made itself felt everywhere. At last He had been lifted up; at last He would draw all men to Him. A convulsion seized upon His frame, and that convulsion seemed to find a response in all the elements of the universe; in sun, in clouds, in all the sky and in the whole earth. The horrible deed had been done amid cries and shouts of madness, but once the Pharisees and the people were face to face with the Crucified

Master outstretched upon His Cross, conscience, silent for so long, at last began to speak urgently through the horror which held them breathless.

The executioners, having finished their dire task with the Body of Jesus, turned their attention to the crucifixion of the two thieves. It was the Jewish custom, as we have seen already, to liberate a prisoner at the time of the Passover. It was never their custom to execute sentence of death upon them at this time. This we see in the account of the treatment accorded the Apostle Peter in later years, when King Agrippa, wishing to put him to death, nevertheless deferred the execution of the sentence until after the Passover. Now, the day of Christ's Crucifixion was not only the first day of the unleavened bread, but the vigil of the great Sabbath of the Passover — "Parasceve Paschæ." (St. John xix, 14.) Hence we see that, by the pressure and urgency of the Sanhedrim, against the spirit of all their ancient laws and customs, they inflicted the death penalty upon Christ on the very day which ordinarily was given up to feasting and the celebration of their escape from Egypt. Since their intention also, was to destroy the last vestige of any reputation, or honor, which the Master had acquired among the people, they hit upon this infamous plan of setting Him up on the Cross between two of the lowest kind of malefactors — thieves and murderers. So we see that, though their intentions were vile and contemptible from every point of view, they were, nevertheless, fulfilling the eternal designs of God and completing the description made of the Messias by the

holy Prophets generations long past: "And with the wicked was He reckoned." (St. Luke XXII, 37.)

The holy Saints of God who have constantly made the Passion the subject of their meditations reveal to us that no incident in this divine tragedy is unimportant or trivial, and so they go on to speak about the position of the Cross upon which Christ died. They tell us that the Cross was faced towards the northwest and thus the back of the Cross was turned towards Jerusalem. This was no accident, but clearly in the designs of the Pharisees to indicate that He was an outcast of the people, and therefore should be deprived even in His dying moments of looking upon the Holy City and the sacred temple gleaming in beauty above the city. They little thought that there was another significance in that act. They would have trembled if they had realized the truth, that the Son of God was really turning His back upon the Holy City and upon the Hebrew nation for the crime they had committed against His Father, and now against Him, the Son of God. They were to pay dearly for this desertion indicated by the placing of the Cross facing away from the city. In a few short years, that city would be no more, but would lie in utter ruin, with not a stone left upon a stone to indicate its majesty and its beauty, and the streets of that city would run with blood, the blood of the deicides. The people would be dying with hunger in the valley beneath, while above them arose the flames of an avenging fire which would burn the last vestiges of Hebrew greatness. Ah, yes, they had

their vicious plans well mapped out and executed to the letter. They forgot that God, too, has His eternal plan. They forgot that, in God's own time, these plans would manifest the perfect justice of the Ruler of Heaven and earth. How terrible is the Justice of God!

From the Cross, facing as it did towards the west, Jesus looked out beyond the hills and the plains of Palestine and His gaze reached over mountains and seas. There in the west, where the sun was sinking gradually towards the horizon, He saw the rise of His new, His universal, and His eternal kingdom upon earth, and there in the heart of the Roman Empire, now given up to conquest and paganism, He saw another Holy City, the city that until the end of time would be the heart and the centre and the capital of the kingdom of divine truth which He had come to establish upon earth. He saw Rome, imperial Rome, whose people would soon, oh, so soon, hurl from the pedestals the false gods which they had worshiped, and erect for His Vicar a throne more lasting, more glorious, more noble than that from which any Cæsar had ever ruled. Looking towards the west, He beheld the march of countless Confessors, Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins of His faith, an army of innumerable holy souls bringing to the very ends of the world the sublime story of what this day He was enduring. He saw there in the west the Cross triumphing over paganism and barbarism; He saw the Cross making new laws for new peoples; He saw the Cross uniting into one great brotherhood all the tribes of the earth; He saw the Cross breaking the chains which for so many centuries had

bound the hands of long-suffering slaves; He saw the Cross consoling men in dire afflictions and sufferings.

Little the Pharisees knew that in the triumph which would come from the facing of the Cross towards the west a new kingdom would rise, firm and strong and invincible; that the old kingdom of Jerusalem would crumble into utter decay under the eyes of the very generation which was now stupidly and criminally turning its back upon the Cross of the Son of God. Down, down, Jerusalem and even pagan Rome would go, and a new empire, a new kingdom, new peoples and new dynasties would rise. Empires and kingdoms and dynasties would fall again and again, but the Kingdom of the Crucified would never fall. In vain, schisms, heresies, plots, intrigues, defections and persecutions would assail that Kingdom founded by the Son of God upon the rock of Peter — of Peter, who had once miserably fallen, who was here to-day, somewhere in the crowd on the hillside, without arms or without soldiers, a penitent filled with the strength of God Himself, against Whom the gates of Hell would never prevail.

Even now, as the gaze of Christ reaches onward and ever onward towards the western sun, even as He feels the weakness of death gathered about His sacred frame, for an instant a smile of peace transforms His Sacred Countenance, and He says again to all these new forces rising up from the tragedy of His Crucifixion: "Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world. I am dying, yes, but I shall return. I shall plant My Kingdom above the ruins of all earthly kingdoms,

and I, now raised in ignominy upon this throne of shame, will soon come to take My place, invisible, it is true, but nevertheless perfectly visible to those who have eyes of faith to see; and that throne will be eternal, and though revolutions shake the earth, though kingdoms and republics totter and fall, My throne will still be there, and millions whose hearts have been purified with trial and suffering will worship at that throne and will see there the glory and the riches of the Son of God which no wealth or jewels can ever equal or surpass." The East had its day of opportunity and rejected it, and Jesus, looking towards the West as His eyes closed to all things in this world, unfurled beyond the mountains and the seas the great banner of His Cross, the standard of eternal triumph.

CHAPTER XV

IT IS FINISHED

The four soldiers who had put the Cross of Jesus in place, and fixed it firm in the ground by hammering down and pressing the fresh soil mingled with the rocks about the foot of it, were by this time thoroughly fatigued, and so, within a few feet of where Our Blessed Lord was hanging, they squatted down upon the ground and began to quarrel about the clothing of Christ which had fallen to them by law. After squabbling over it for a little while, they finally decided to cast the dice so as to see what division of the clothing each one should have. So, one after the other, the different articles of the clothing which Our Blessed Lord had worn were taken over by the men to whom they fell by lot. When, finally, they came to the tunic that He had worn next to His body, they found that it was a seamless garment, woven completely from top to bottom without being sewn in any place, and they said to each other: "Oh, it would be a crime to tear this garment in pieces, so let us cast lots for it." How little they knew at that moment that they, too, were fulfilling the prophecy of David to the letter: "They have dug My hands and My feet, they have numbered all My bones, . . . they parted My garments amongst them, and upon My vesture they cast lots." (Psalm xxi, 17, 19.)

Nor could they, blinded as they were, understand the

full meaning of the precious relic which had fallen to their brutal hands. The seamless garment was but a figure of the perfect unity of Christ's Church. As St. Augustine says: "That tunic signified the eternal unity which would be held together in the bond of love." And so the executioners themselves, moved perhaps by the curiosity of the thing itself, refused to cut it up or to tear it in pieces for division among them, but they left it intact as if by some special intervention of Providence Itself. How different it was with the veil of the temple, which, at the time of Christ's death, was rent from top to bottom as a sign of the dissolution of the old law and the destruction of the unity of the Jewish people. St. Athanasius sees in both these signs, on the one hand, the indefectibility of the Church of Christ, and on the other, the utter division and separation of the Mosaic law and the Synagogue. "The veil of the temple," he says, "was rent, but the tunic of the Saviour was not divided even by the soldiers, but remained whole and entire. Thus remains whole and entire the Gospel of Christ, while the symbol and the sign of it (that is, the Synagogue) falls to pieces."

And now the Pharisees and the multitude began to gather around the foot of the Cross, and looking up they saw nailed above the head of Jesus the title: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." They were filled with rage at the sight of this title, which already had begun to provoke from the Roman soldiers ridicule and laughter. So they decided to send at once a deputation to Pilate

asking him to change that inscription and to put in its place: "He said that He is the King of the Jews." Hurriedly the deputation ran down the hill of Calvary and up the streets to the prætorium. They clamored vociferously at the doors of the palace and delivered their message, but Pilate, who had had quite enough of their insolence, brusquely answered them, saying: "What I have written I have written," which meant clearly to them, "That title remains just as it is." And now we cannot help wondering, did Pilate really know the truth of his words, for "The King of the Jews" meant undoubtedly the Messias, the Redeemer.

By this time a sentiment of reaction began to make itself felt in the hearts of the multitude. For a while, it is true, they had yielded to an insanity which they could not explain. They had been urged to all these excesses by the machinations of the Pharisees and of the Sanhedrim, and they had gone to the very limit of abuse under the pressure of these fanatics. But when a hush finally fell upon the multitude at the sight of Jesus upon the Cross, little by little, they began to think, and more normal sentiments began to take possession of them. Passions so strong as those they had yielded to for the last few hours were too excessive to endure, and as they saw the sublime patience of the Victim their hearts began to be touched with a strange emotion and they began to be ashamed of all their rage and insanity towards Him. Lowering clouds that gathered around the Holy City began to strike terror to their hearts, so, gathering their garments about them, they slowly

wandered down the path leading towards the gate of the city, many of them striking their breasts in penitence and bowing their heads in shame.

Among the few still gathered about the Cross were some who could not tear themselves away from the sight, which seemed to hold them as in a fascination or spell. They felt that something extraordinary was happening and they wanted to see it to the end. One whispered to another secretly: "What, indeed, if after all this were the Messias?" and as it reached the ears of the hardened and incredulous they shouted for a sign. If this were the Messias He had the power to set Himself free, and if even at this hour He would perform this great miracle before their eyes, thus satisfying to the full their vain curiosity, they might believe in Him.

And so in mockery they taunted Him: "Bah! Thou Who destroyest the temple of God and in three days rebuild it, save Thyself! If Thou art the Son of God, come down from the Cross!" And thus they hoped to achieve both purposes, to satisfy their own incredulity and to shut forever the mouths of those who already were beginning to lisp doubts as to the true character of Jesus. And around about the Cross others took up the cry, wagging their heads and sneering: "He hath saved others, Himself He cannot save. If Thou be the Christ, the Son of God, come down from the Cross that we may believe in Thee!" And still others: "He trusted in God; let Him now deliver Him!" And so for a time the air was rent again with these insulting shouts and cries. For a moment they waited and nothing happened. Bah!

what nonsense was this that had been whispered around concerning the Messias?

Here was another blow aimed straight at the tender heart of Our Lord. Again and again He had performed His miracles before their very eyes. Their hearts had remained cold and obdurate, and now the memory of these very miracles were flaunted in His face as a laughing-stock, and He was invited by this miserable rabble to glut their mere curiosity at the sight of another miracle, which doubtless would have had the same fruitless effect. They would have explained this away as they had explained away all the others. It would be but a sign of magic, a bit of diabolical art in their eyes. He read the hardness of their hearts and the vanity of their curiosity, and the sight of it made Him nearly swoon upon the Cross. It was then that one of the soldiers, seizing a sponge, dipped it in vinegar, put it on the end of a reed and raised it up to the lips of Jesus. Oh, bitterness upon bitterness, and sorrow upon sorrow, and injury added to insult and insult to injury! And so the awful tragedy still continued.

Christ Speaks

Calmly and with perfect patience Christ heard these infamous shouts and yells of mockery about Him, and the thought came to Him: "Is there no end to the blasphemy they are uttering, is there no limit to the ways in which they are calling down upon themselves the vengeance of God?" And instantly came the response from the depths of His Sacred Heart, a response of mercy

and of forgiveness, and, raising His eyes to Heaven, then dropping His head forward upon His breast, He breathed a solemn prayer. It was the first word He had spoken in all that terrible scene. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Oh, word of divine compassion and of divine understanding! To know all is to pardon all, and Christ knew all, therefore was His pardon so complete. Behold the infinite charity of the Son of God! Never in the whole history of the world under such circumstances were such wonderful words pronounced. Here is the sublime example of forgiveness which would be held up as an example, for all time, to all His followers. He had said once before during the years of His public ministry: Not seven times but seventy times seven times, you must forgive the injuries done you. That means God's pardon is ever ready to all who ask it, no matter how black their sins, even though they be as innumerable as the sands of the seashore. The mercy of God is infinite and His pardon is ever ready for those who, with sorrow for their evil deeds, turn finally to the Fountain of all goodness.

The Conversion of the Thief

There was one who heard those words just fallen from the lips of Christ to whom they appeared in all the fullness of their divine character. The two thieves crucified on either side of Him were a hardened pair. They were men of crime, men of infamous character, cruel and hard-hearted and little capable of being touched with any

gentle emotion. They had watched from their places the gentle figure of Christ. They saw that, while they had shouted back blasphemies to the crowd and to the soldiers who had crucified them, He, though suffering infinitely more than they, bore Himself throughout with a calm dignity and a wonderful patience. They heard now this challenge sent up to Him to reveal by a miracle the divinity to which He had laid claim, and they too waited anxiously to see if anything might happen. And then they heard this prayer from the lips of Jesus, a prayer of pardon for his persecutors.

At first they were both struck with an unspeakable surprise. A prayer for pardon upon this bloodthirsty mob? Dismas, the thief on the cross at the right of Jesus, looked in astonishment at the face of Christ. Suddenly his eyes were opened, and into that strange heart covered with so much crime a ray of divine light began to make its way gently but irresistibly. Again he looked, straining his eyes to peer into the soul of the Man he had heard called the Prophet of God. A moment before he had added his voice to the shouts of the crowd, but even louder than they he had yelled from his place to Jesus: "If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and save us!" But suddenly a change came over him.

The other thief still shouted impious blasphemy towards the Cross of Jesus, and Dismas, already conscious in a vague way of the perfect innocence and sinlessness of the Master, turned to him and said: "Hast thou no fear of God, thou who soon must die? We die justly, for we receive the punishment due to our evil

deeds, but this One," he continued, turning his face towards Jesus, "this One has done no evil." His profession of faith was already made in these words. The grace of God as a first answer to the prayer of Christ upon the Cross already was flooding his soul with the fullness of conviction. Suddenly, yielding himself to the new light, the new love just born in his soul, he said, in a voice which sounded strangely in his own ears: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom."

Here again we witness the difference of response in different souls to the invitation of God to grace and mercy. We have seen already this difference in the examples of Peter, who repented and became a great saint, and Judas, who only hardened his heart the more and died a suicide. And here upon Calvary again the same thing happens. Christ prays for pardon. Both the thieves hear the prayer. One of them, touched profoundly, moved to the depths of his soul, answers, professes his faith, asks forgiveness, and is forgiven. The other, too, hears, but divine grace can find no entrance to that hardened and embittered soul. It knocks, but no one opens. And so one thief becomes a saint even upon the cross at the last hour of his life, and the other dies without one word of understanding or of faith or of love.

But these words of Christ in His prayer of forgiveness not only asked that the mercy of God might be extended to those around and about Him there on Calvary. Ah, no. The fruit of those words was to reach to the very ends of the world and during all the centuries to come. Again and again, according to the words of St. Paul,

Christ would be crucified by the sins of men, and this prayer, made to His Eternal Father at the time of His Crucifixion, would have the same efficacy wherever sin was found if only the sinner, like the good thief upon the cross, would embrace the pardon held out to him. Oh, the greatness of the love of Christ for sinners! How true are the words of St. Paul:—"The love of Christ compels us to love Him in return"—"Caritas Christi urget Nos."

We, too, miserable sinners as we all are, gazing with repentance upon the Crucifix, can still hear the tender voice of Christ saying again to us, "Pardon, Pardon." What hope of life is in those words to the soul depressed with sorrow at the thought of its guilt! How the sight of the Crucifix must comfort and console us always! Consider the words of St. John: "If anyone hath sinned let him not despair, for we have near the Father as our Advocate Jesus Christ, the Just One, and He is the propitiation for our sins." Yes, Christ might ask the Father anything and it would be granted. His prayer of pardon has been heard and then answered, and so it will be until the end of time. He has paid the price of our iniquities, He has satisfied Divine Justice by His death, and so in Him is our hope, we shall not be confounded forever. The prayer of Christ is always the all-powerful advocate before God, but, oh, horrible thought! we may by our obstinacy cut ourselves off from the pardon of God and the fruit of the prayer of Christ if we remain unmoved by the mercy of God as did the impenitent thief and the impenitent and insolent Jews about the foot of the Cross.

All during His mortal life He had taught the omnipotence of God's mercy and had inculcated in His disciples the great duty to forgive all, even as they themselves hoped to be forgiven. In His great prayer, the "Our Father," again we see the manifestation of Christ's doctrine of constant forgiveness: "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Every day of His life He had exemplified in His acts the truth of His doctrine; not once, not seven times, but seventy times seven times He had forgiven and constantly pardoned, and now, with His last words as He dies upon the Cross, He reveals again the constancy of that truth and the efficacy of that doctrine. His last prayer is one of forgiveness of His enemies.

At the sight of this touching example of our dying Redeemer, shall we harden our hearts against those who have done us harm or have injured us? Shall not the very last words of Christ teach us our duty even towards those who hate us as Christ's persecutors hated Him? Our daily prayer must be that which Christ offered up to His Eternal Father from the altar of the Cross in the midst of His awful sufferings and the penalties inflicted upon Him even by the worst of sinners: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The Second Word of Christ from the Cross

The conversion of Dismas was complete. Beholding before him this perfect example of patience and innocence, and hearing from His lips the wonderful words of

divine pardon, he was touched to the depths of his soul. "Surely, surely," he said, "this is no mortal man. No man suffering unjustly as He is suffering would ever offer such a prayer of pardon as that. No, this is no mere man, though evidently He is suffering in the flesh. That title above His head tells the true story. Here is the Great Prophet before me; here in very truth is the King of Israel. Here is the Messias sent by God to redeem the world and to redeem even me." And then, in the depths of the humility of his heart, even as one day the publican in the temple struck his breast and said simply and humbly: "Lord, pardon me, a sinner," so the good thief, while not daring to ask for his own liberation from the awful sufferings of the cross, nay, without even daring to ask for pardon, turned his head towards the Cross of Christ, with a look of perfect love upon his now transformed countenance, and cried to his Saviour, "Lord, remember me." Only remembrance he begged. To Jesus he would leave all the rest. But what perfect faith, what perfect love, what perfect trust! Behold what divine grace can do to even those whose whole lives have been steeped in crime, if only there be still left some little opening into which the love of God can penetrate.

Instantly his prayer is heard; instantly the reward of his faith and his hope is promised by the lips of Him Who is Truth itself. Jesus gently turned His sacred head in the direction of the cross of Dismas and softly uttered the words which transformed a sinner into a saint: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Only God could pronounce such words. There was no doubt,

no condition, no obstacle, now to be overcome. The Holiness of God had enveloped the soul of a poor thief, and already the glory of sanctity shone from the cross of Dismas. Jesus knew that this poor man had been rejected, hunted, and despised by the whole world. Jesus knew full well the hard-heartedness of the world and its mercilessness towards those it rejected. To these Pharisees and the rabble at the foot of the cross Dismas was a miserable outcast of humanity. To Christ he was a precious soul created by God, His Father, for eternal happiness, who had wandered away for a while from the laws of God, but who was now utterly and completely repentant of all his sins. He was already redeemed by Christ's Precious Blood, he was numbered among those who for all eternity would be among the elect, who forever and forever would glorify God in an eternity of happiness. "This day." No vague promise here. And, hearing those divine words of complete understanding and of perfect promise, Dismas forgot all his sufferings in the vision of that eternal fatherland into which he would enter before the night had come — enter as a companion of the Son of God Himself.

And while all this was happening between Christ and the good thief, what was going on even within a few feet of this wonderful scene, on the other cross at the left of the Master's? The impenitent thief, hearing the words of pardon, only grew more resentful, for he saw in those tender words, not mercy, but an absurd weakness and softness. Divine grace was hovering over his cross also; the same pardon was held out to him as to his companion;

but he resented it, rejected it, refused it. And so, when he heard from the dying lips of Jesus the wonderful promise of redemption and salvation made to Dismas, it meant to this hardened and impenitent wretch only words of folly and nonsense, and his answer was a bitter laugh of irony followed by more railing and abuse — abuse, even of Him Who had promised pardon if only pardon could reach his stony heart.

He heard, it is true, but his ears served his soul for nothing.

O Blessed Lord, grant that our ears be ever open to Thy sweet and tender voice, that we may understand the true meaning of all Thy words.

From that moment Dismas used the remnant of his strength to persuade the other thief and the Jews standing about his cross to do penance for the awful crime they had committed against the Son of God. Again and again he warned them of the penalties that their impenitence would call down upon their heads, and he died still endeavoring to reveal to the world the wonderful mystery of his own conversion. And thus, though years of crime had been rolled up against him, at least his last moments were those of a great disciple, and a great apostle of the new kingdom of God's truth.

All that we have just narrated took place very rapidly. One incident succeeded another with such haste that the bystanders, absorbed in what was taking place, almost forgot to look beyond the hills and over the city to where,

little by little in the sky above, the sun, though it was full midday, was already concealed behind the darkness of opaque clouds and shadows. The sun in the meridian had hidden itself. Darkness overspread the land, the darkness of midnight, and out of the darkness came a strange light from the stars. Instantly the people realized that Heaven and earth were giving testimony of great horror — a horror which soon seized upon all men and even upon the animals about the countryside. Cries of terror filled the air, and from the dogs and the beasts of burden there arose a plaintive wailing and braying, as if they, too, felt the strangeness of the awful situation. Burying their faces in their hoods and cloaks, the terror-stricken people fled precipitately down the hillside through the gates of the city towards their homes. St. Matthew writes with singular precision (XXVII, 45): "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole earth, until the ninth hour." And St. Luke, with even greater precision, adds: "The sun was darkened." (St. Luke XXIII, 45.)

This darkening of the sun was certainly not an ordinary eclipse, as happens when the moon stands between the sun and the earth, because at that time it was the full moon of the Passover, and therefore the moon, instead of being between the sun and the earth, was precisely on the opposite side of the sun from the earth. Besides, no total eclipse of the sun ever lasts three hours. The passage of the lunar disc over the sun is relatively of very short duration, and the whole face of the sun is never covered more than a very few minutes.

It is clear, then, that this fact, described by the Evangelists, was an extraordinary phenomenon, in no way to be explained by the ordinary laws of nature.

An extraordinary phenomenon of this kind, described so simply and so clearly by the Evangelists, surely could not remain hidden from the rest of the world. In fact, we find in the writings of the ancients of about that time references which indicate that this unnatural eclipse was observed in very many places. First of all, we have the testimony of St. Dionysius the Areopagite. In writing to his friend Apolophan he says that, when he was about twenty-five years old, living at the time at Heliopolis in Egypt, and beholding this extraordinary phenomenon of the sudden complete darkening of the Heavens at midday, he exclaimed: "Either the Author of nature is suffering or the whole machinery of the world is falling to pieces." This same Dionysius was afterwards converted by the preaching of St. Paul, and then he understood the full meaning of what he had seen several years before, and his acceptance of the meaning of the revelation he also records in other letters to his friend.

Again Origen, who lived about one hundred and eighty years after the death of Christ, records very clearly the same wonderful event. Julius Africanus, a contemporary of Origen and one of the most learned Christians of his time, makes very clear and unmistakable mention of this terrible phenomenon in the history of events which he recorded from the beginning of the world to the fourth year of the Emperor Caligula, which would be about two hundred and twenty years after the death of Christ.

Eusebius of Cæsarea, another famous historian, transcribed much of what he found in the works of Julius Africanus, and among other things appears also the description of this darkening of the sun at midday. Besides this testimony, we have also the word of St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Jerome, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Hilary, St. Augustine, and St. Leo the Great.

We have, besides all this, in the Apologetic of Tertullian, written in defense of Christian truth to the Roman magistrates, these words: "At the same moment the sun gave forth no light, though it was then midday. This prodigy was reckoned by those who did not understand its meaning as an extraordinary eclipse, but that was because they did not know that this sign, too, had been predicted to happen at the time of the death of Christ. Nevertheless, you will find this phenomenon described as a world-wide event in the documents which you have in your archives." (The Apologetic of Tertullian, XXI.)

Again we find in the Acts of the martyrdom of St. Lucian, a priest of Antioch in the year 312, as described by the historian Rufinus, that this confessor of the faith said to his judge: "Consult your annals and you will find that at the time of Pilate, when Christ suffered, the sun disappeared and the day was darkened with clouds." (Rufinus, Book 9, v.)

Now, this testimony of the apologists, Tertullian and Lucian, is irresistible in its force. The purpose of these apologists was to demonstrate to the pagan rulers that Christ was God and that His religion was divine, and

that therefore these rulers, in persecuting the Christians, were guilty of a terrible injustice; and as a proof of Christ's Divinity they appealed to the miracles which He had wrought and to the prodigies which had surrounded His whole life, and especially to this fact of the darkening of the sun at midday, and for proof of the fact they referred these Roman magistrates to their own archives.

It is perfectly clear from this that the pagans themselves had not only noticed the extraordinary phenomenon, but had recorded it in the documents of state. Evidently some of these rulers at least had great regard for the powerful arguments put forth by Tertullian, and no doubt they set the scholars to work to verify his words. Whatever other conclusions they drew from their research, one thing is perfectly clear, that the Apologetic of Tertullian produced a profound effect upon the minds of the rulers, and, for a time at least, they tempered the horrors of their persecution of the Christians.

Finally, we have also the authority of two pagan writers, Phlegon and Thallus, who concur in the testimony of this darkening of the sun at midday at the time of Christ's death. Phlegon, living at the time of the Emperor Hadrian, wrote the history of the Olympiads, from the date of their origin to the year 140 of the Christian era, and he narrates that in the fourth year of the two hundred and second Olympiad, which would be about the eighteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (corresponding to the time of the death of Christ), there occurred an eclipse of the sun, the greatest that had ever happened. The darkness was so thick that

even at midday the stars were visible. Bithynia was shaken with a terrible earthquake and a great part of the city of Nicea was laid in ruins. Julius Africanus adds that Phlegon testified that this eclipse of the sun took place at the time of the full moon.

Thallus, a Grecian historian contemporaneous with Augustus and Tiberius, Roman Emperors, in his history of Syria repeats and confirms in every detail the narrative of Phlegon.

We know well that many of the documents of that time were completely destroyed, both at the time of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the overrunning of all Palestine by the Roman forces. And then later, during the terrible persecutions which raged for nearly three centuries, there is no doubt that thousands upon thousands of documents and books which to-day would describe at great length the events which happened about that time were burnt or torn to pieces by the enemies of the Christians. Among these, without a doubt, were the Acts written by Pontius Pilate to Tiberius. That these letters of Pilate really existed we have the fullest proof in the works of St. Justin, who, in his Apologia to the Emperor Antonine and to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, begs these Emperors and the Roman magistrates to read again what Pontius Pilate had written with regard to the trial and the condemnation of Jesus. Now, from all that has thus far been said, it is perfectly clear that there was a great crowd of witnesses giving testimony to this darkening of the sun at midday during the Crucifixion of Christ.

One may ask, what was the cause of this obscuring of the sun at noon, or just how did it happen? The answer is that, like so many other wonders performed by the hand of God, we see the fact, and the fact is recorded as indisputable. The fact cannot be explained by natural law. God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, rules His universe and disposes of all things according to His own Divine Will. That this darkening of the sun at midday took place cannot be reasonably doubted. How it took place and by what means, that is a secret of God.

Jerusalem at the Time of Christ's Crucifixion

When, at the moment of Christ's death, a profound darkness covered the earth, though it was early afternoon, the people of Jesusalem were seized with a terrible fright and confusion. Many stood in the open squares, with their faces concealed in their cloaks, and, beating their breasts, begged God to forgive them. Others mounted to the roofs of their houses and there gave vent to wailing and lamentation. The crows and the scavengers of the air swung low over the roofs of the city. Pilate and Herod met to talk over the mysterious events that were happening. They both had good reason to fear. The hand of God was stretched out in anger over both their houses. Across the squares of the city ran little groups hither and thither, not knowing where to go. The wiseacres, the scribes and the Pharisees, gathered around the wall of the temple explaining to one another that this terrible darkness was merely some natural phenomenon of the elements. But among the crowds in

the square and on the roofs of the houses there were many who realized that God was thus giving testimony of His wrath at the death of His Divine Son, and with weeping eyes they looked up at the dark heavens imploring mercy and forgiveness. And even then the God of mercy and forgiveness listened to their prayers and filled their souls with the conviction of Christ's Divinity. In a few days these converts to the faith of Christ would give testimony of their loyalty and fidelity. They were already among the first fruits of Redemption. They would be among those who formed the first congregation to be known forever as the Church of Christ.

This should have been a day of rejoicing among the Jews, for it was the Feast of the Passover, but instead it was a day of lamentation and of consternation. On every side was heard the sound of weeping and the very animals joined in the general chorus of utter confusion and terror.

Greater and greater became the darkness until at last the crosses raised upon the top of Golgotha became almost invisible in a black mist. As the crowd in frightened groups suddenly fled down the sides of Calvary, a little group of women, their veils concealing their sad faces, crept timidly nearer and nearer to the foot of the Cross of Jesus. Erect, her face now revealed, one of them enfolds the wood of the Cross in her arms, and, with eyes which revealed at the same time infinite sorrow and infinite courage, she looked up at the face of the Master. There in the gloom which grew darker and darker about the Cross the Mother of Jesus took her place nearest to

the bruised Body of the Divine Victim. Silence reigned supreme over the top of the hill. The soldiers, overcome with fatigue and terror, betook themselves a short distance away from the Cross and sat down upon the ground, their eyes, bulging with fright, still gazing upon the face of their Victim.

Jesus and Mary, the holiest of mothers and the holiest of sons, at least for these few moments, in perfect silence, gazed at each other in complete understanding and divine recognition. He knew, oh, so well, that she understood all. He realized to the full that, while the gentle tenderness of His Mother's heart was torn in anguish, nevertheless, He read in her face the absolute and complete submission to God's will, which was also His.

Only for a moment the silence lasted and then the divine lips parted with a tremor, and the beloved disciple John, who had eagerly watched every move of the Son and the Mother, now went quickly to the foot of the Cross. The eyes of the Master looked deep into the soul of His beloved companion and friend and they read in the pure soul of St. John the worthiness of the gift He was about to bequeath him. And now, turning that sacred gaze once more to the face of His sweet Mother, He said to her: "Lady, behold thy son," indicating by a glance St. John, who stood by her side. Then He riveted His eyes upon His beloved friend and said to him, at the same time indicating His beloved Mother: "Behold thy Mother."

The end was very near. At the last supper He had given Himself in the Holy Eucharist to all His Apostles

and to all the faithful until the end of time. There was only one treasure left. This He had reserved to the very end, and so at the moment of His death He seems to relinquish everything. No longer does He call Mary — "Mother." That was His own intimate personal relation to her, but instead He says, "Lady," or, "Woman," intending thus to indicate her new title, the Mother of all those who loved Him. And so, without ceasing to be the Mother of God, Mary, the Blessed Virgin, was at that moment given to be the Mother of all who acknowledged His Sacred Name, and so He, through her, the Mother of all Christians, became our elder Brother. Eve, the first mother of the human race, by her disobedience and her desire for pleasure had brought sin and death into the world, and Mary, by renouncing everything that she owned, or had, or was, became the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God; and thus through her, by the Christ, the Messias, the world was redeemed and salvation assured.

The Blessed Mother and St. John understood with perfect clearness the meaning of the words of the Master upon the Cross. They received the solemn gift in complete silence, for their hearts were too full of understanding and of gratitude to allow any reply. With a look upwards to the face of Jesus, their eyes spoke sentiments which no words of the lips could reveal, and then the Blessed Virgin and St. John looked at each other. The bond was perfected, the compact completed. "From that hour," the Evangelist says, "the disciple took her to his own." (St. John XIX, 27.)

And now the Blessed Mother of Jesus could stand no more. She leaned for support for a moment against the wood of the Cross as if she were about to fall. Instantly St. John supported her with the strength of his youthful arms and gently led her away. The pious women followed, and there, seated a little apart from the Cross upon the stony earth, they continued in silence the long vigil of the Crucifixion.

The Abandonment of Jesus

Around about the top of the hill of Calvary there was now a deathly silence. Most of the rabble, terrified by the darkness and the trembling of the earth, had fled into the city. The soldiers, weary with their long watch, sat in a little group upon the ground. The good thief, filled to overflowing with thoughts of wonder and of gratitude, murmured softly the words which arose from his heart. Jesus from His throne, the hard wood of the Cross, gazed over the hillside about Him and saw at last that He was utterly alone, utterly bereft of all consolation. His lips moved as He whispered the sacred psalms, the truth of whose prophecies was now verified to the full.

The Fourth Word

Slowly the moments passed, counted off by the dropping of the blood from the Cross of Jesus to the ground. The darkness grew darker still and the moments seemed interminable. Utterly overwhelmed by the feeling of desolation which now possessed Him, a cry of abandonment came from His trembling lips: "Eli, Eli, lamma

sabacthani!" — that is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!"

A thousand years before this time, David, in the midst of his adversities, had wailed forth these same words. Now it was Jesus, of Whom David was only a figure, Who, in the midst of complete and absolute desolation, uttered the same pathetic cry. He had asked that the chalice should pass from Him. Nevertheless, He would drink it, if such were His Father's Will. And now He drinks it, even to the very last dregs, and the bitterness of that last bitter drop wrung from His patient soul the cry which pierced the very Heaven, asking of His Eternal Father why He had thus utterly and completely left Him to suffer and to die in the horror of silence, in the utter darkness of a midday that was midnight. The burden of the sins of the world was crushing Him. It seems as though the limit, even of His endurance, had been reached, and now, even when the hour was darkest and His sufferings most cruel, even His Father seemed to abandon and to forget Him.

Every act of Jesus upon the Cross, every word that He spoke in that terrible hour of His agony, was meant for our instruction and our consolation. Are there not times when we, too, feel as if we had been abandoned even by God Himself? Have we not, also, moments of supreme agony when there is no friend near, no word of understanding spoken, no word of consolation offered to us? Have we not to undergo moments when even the consolations of religion seem incapable of reaching us, or speaking to us? Ah, should such moments as these come

again, we must lift up our eyes to the Cross; we must realize all the abandonment and desolation which He suffered. And if the cry of abandonment is forced from our lips, let it not be — it must not be — the cry of despair, but only the cry for help; for we know, as Jesus knew, that beyond the awful silence in which we hear no voice of friendship or kindness or understanding or sympathy, the ear of God is still open to our prayer. Behind that impenetrable gloom which surrounds us, the eye of God still watches, and the hour of God will strike at last; the gloom and the silence will disappear; and, if we are faithful in this hardest of all trials to bear, the trial of abandonment, we shall finally see the smile of God and hear, amid the silence, the voice of God's approbation.

This utter desolation of the Divine Word, this apparent concealment of the presence of His Father, is a mystery which we can never hope to unfold on earth. Jesus Christ suffered and wished to suffer to the very last extreme even of spiritual destitution. He would spare Himself nothing in the long list of sorrow and grief and pain, and so, in a way which we cannot conceive, much less express, the humanity of Christ, though united by hypostatic union to the Divinity, felt or allowed itself to feel the absence of God's presence and love.

The soldiers, seated some little distance off, and the few Jews still gathered, whether by curiosity or hatred or love, upon the top of Golgotha, heard the loud cry which had come from the dying Jesus. "Eli!" they heard, and confounding the real word with the name of the prophet Elias, they said to one another: "Behold, He

is calling Elias," and they stood in expectation and wonderment waiting to see whether or not, at this cry, the prophet would again return to earth and manifest himself before the Cross. And so they waited, and as they understood nothing of the meaning of Christ's words, they waited in vain.

The Fifth Word

The terrible loss of blood and the fever of the death agony created in Jesus a terrible thirst. All the night before and all through the day up till now He had been dragged hither and thither, abused, railed at, insulted and scourged, and finally crucified. To let us understand that this was no mere fantasy of suffering, He underwent every phase of bodily pain, and now He suffered an awful and insatiable thirst which compelled Him to utter the pathetic words: "I thirst." Oh, yes, surely, surely He felt the terrible suffering of this bodily thirst which now possessed Him, but, oh, infinitely more did He mean by those words to express the thirst that ravished His soul, the thirst of the Son of God for souls, the thirst for their redemption and their salvation. This thirst, infinitely more racking than any bodily lack of drink, overwhelmed His loving and tender Heart, and in this longing, this infinite longing of the Heart of Jesus for our eternal welfare, is the great hope of our salvation. And so St. Augustine exclaims: "Thy thirst, O Lord, is my salvation."

The Apostle St. John writes that Christ said these words so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, alluding

to the words of the psalmist (Psalms LXVIII, 22): "And they gave Me gall for My food, and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink."

Hearing this cry of Christ, one of the soldiers ran and dipped a sponge in vinegar, and, putting it on the top of a reed, pressed it to the lips of Christ. What an answer to the cry of Jesus, bitterness, more bitterness and ever bitterness, for all His goodness and His sweetness and His mercy! And even while the soldier, in his rude way, made at least some attempt to answer the call of Christ asking for drink to slake His terrible thirst, others among the crowd attempted to deprive Him of even that bitter comfort. "Let be," they cried. "Let us see whether Elias will come to deliver Him." (St. Matthew XXVII, 49.)

The Sixth and Seventh Words

Thicker and denser grew the darkness about the Cross, and now the ninth hour was at hand, corresponding to our three o'clock in the afternoon. The soldiers and the few others left about the Cross looked at each other in silence, wondering whether out of the darkness would come the voice of Elias; wondering if in the impenetrable mists would suddenly appear Elias himself to free the Crucified from His agony. And while they thus waited, they heard a moan from the lips of Jesus above them. They looked up and beheld the Victim in the very extremes of death. His face was utterly pallid, the body had grown livid and the death sweat was pouring from every member. A shiver passed over the sacred form. The end was very close at hand, and Jesus announced

that the final moment was near as He moaned gently: "Consummatum est" — "It is finished."

At last the work of human redemption was completely finished; the justice of God was satisfied; sinful man was pardoned; the mission of the Redeemer was completed. In that final moment, lifting His eyes to Heaven, Jesus saw the face of His Father beaming with a glance of divine approval. God's eternal plans had not failed. In spite of the malice of men and the incredulity and the hardness of the hearts of His own people, Jesus had verified, in His life, His deeds, His words, His Passion, and now, in His dying moments, the very last detail of all the prophecies foretelling the coming of the Messias and the work of Redemption which He would complete. Christ Himself had said: "No one can take My life from Me. I alone have the power to lay it down and the power to take it up again." Now, in very truth, He was laying down His life for mankind, and His weary soul and His tired and suffering Body longed for the repose of the sepulchre, which would be to Him only the door of the Resurrection to eternal glory. And so it was finished — consummatum est; all over at last, the ignominy, the reviling, the blasphemy; all over, the treachery and the abandonment; all over, the shame and the perfidy; yes, all, all was now over; and soon life, eternal life would triumph over death. And again lifting His weary head upright upon the Cross He turned one last loving gaze towards Heaven, where the God of mercy reigned and whence, even now, the smile of His Eternal Father beamed down upon Him.

Over the weary and blood-stained face of Jesus spread the glory and the beauty of a smile which meant more than any words could say: "I have done Thy will, O Father, I have drunk the chalice even to the very dregs, and now I return to Thee, I am coming home." And again from lips smiling even in the agony of death, He cried in joyful accents, knowing that the final triumph had been won: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And then, as His head dropped suddenly upon His breast, He yielded up the ghost. And here St. John Chrysostom remarks: "It was not the power of death that bent that divine head. No. It was the will of Him Who was dying only to prove by His very death that He was the Sovereign Lord of all things." Death had not conquered Him. He was not submitting as one powerless before the laws of nature. Even in His death He commanded them: "Oblatus est quia ipse voluit."

Mary, the Mother of Christ, St. John and the holy women were kneeling under the dead figure of the crucified Master. Mary knew that, while her heart was overflowing with grief, the glory of the Resurrection would soon wipe away all sorrow. The others for the moment could think only of the sadness which overwhelmed them. Christ had spoken, not once, but several times, of His Resurrection which would come soon after His death, but at that moment they were so overwhelmed with grief at the sight of their dead Master that the remembrance was dim and vague and doubtful before their eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EARTHQUAKE

The hour when Christ died upon the Cross was the sacred hour in which was immolated the paschal lamb in the temple, and so at this very time the people of Jerusalem were gathered within the sacred precincts of the temple to celebrate by sacrifice their liberation from the slavery of Egypt. This sacrifice was only a prophetic sign of the liberation from the slavery of sin at this moment accomplished upon Calvary. The silver trumpets blared out their message on Mount Moria. At the moment that Christ closed His eyes in death, and while the echoes of the trumpets still resounded from the walls of the sacred city, an awful trembling seized the earth under their feet, and shock upon shock rocked the earth. The hill of Calvary was shaken from its summit to its foundations and a huge rent was torn in the hillside close to the Cross of Christ.

That rent in the rock of Calvary is visible to-day. It is a deep fissure, beginning on the summit of Calvary and reaching down the rocky surface of the hill, ending near the spot where the schismatic Greeks at the present time have their little chapel. The character of this fissure, running as it does against the natural vein, is, even from a scientific point of view, a proof that it was no normal division or separation of the layers, but the result of a most violent earthquake.

At the moment when Christ yielded up the ghost, the

Roman centurion who had commanded the cohort in charge of the execution rode up to the foot of the Cross, and, seated upon his horse, he gazed intently upon the face of Christ. As he heard the last words of Jesus, the grace of God touched his soul, and illumined his mind, and he exclaimed: "Truly this man was innocent." (St. Luke XXIII, 47.) Instantly an awful rumbling was heard and the ground shook under his horse's feet. A crash like that of a great explosion accompanied the shattering of the rocks and the opening of the soil of the hill of Calvary. His horse reared and plunged with terror. A yell of fear rose from the bystanders. In terror they threw themselves upon the ground, not knowing what next would happen to them. The centurion, reining in his terrified horse, sought to control his own terrible emotions. At last he was fully convinced that the Victim upon the Cross was the promised Redeemer of the world, and, bowing down his head in reverence, he struck his breast and cried: "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Many of the soldiers, hearing this exclamation from the lips of their commander, also bowed their heads before the Cross and confessed their belief in Christ's Divinity. The centurion, filled with consternation, yielding his command to his lieutenant, fled on his horse down the hillside and, galloping through the city, where the people, overcome with terror, were running hither and thither, he rode up to the prætorium to give to Pilate, his chief, full information regarding the events which had just happened.

The crowd upon Calvary, now much diminished in numbers, overwhelmed by the rumbling of the earth and the earthquake which followed, fled, striking their breasts in terror. Nature herself was indicating by potent signs the abhorrence which she felt at the crime committed by men. The heart of inanimate things seemed to be less obdurate than the hearts of the enemies of Jesus. They had not been terrified at the sight of His awful Passion, but now when Nature spoke in tones of vengeance they began at last to realize their crime. Many of them in that hour began to do penance for the sins they had committed, and most of all, for the sin of deicide, whose awful guilt they now began to realize. While the placid and calm countenance of Jesus had little effect upon their stony hearts, the terrors of Nature broke through the battlements of their pride and the grace of God entered. Many of them openly confessed their faith and became members of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. Truly Christ had said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself." (St. John XII, 32.) The glory of His Crucifixion had already begun.

Within the temple the high priests were in the midst of the ceremony of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. They, like all the rest of the people of Jerusalem, had been deeply moved with terror at the sight of the awful darkness which hung over the temple, but still, with a feeling that they had triumphed over this false Prophet, they gathered the people to the sacrifice and went on to carry out all the sacred ceremonial of the Pasch. Sud-

denly the temple shook to its very foundations. Mount Moria trembled to its depth. The very walls about them rocked, and huge openings were visible in the strong partitions. Suddenly it seemed as if some tremendous force was at work in the Holy of Holies itself. A sound as if of a terrific hissing was heard all over the precincts of the temple, and in an instant the veil of the temple was rent. The two columns supporting the doorway of the Holy of Holies fell with a crash to the ground, and the architrave of tremendous size which they had supported was hurled to the earth and broken into bits.

While the priests looked on overwhelmed with surprise and terror, the people threw themselves upon the pavement crying with fright. A loud voice resounded throughout the great hall of the temple, shouting in terrifying accents: "Let us leave this place; let us go out from here." Then in consternation the priests and people heard the patter of invisible footsteps running towards the exit of the temple. We learn this from the testimony of St. Jerome, of Josephus Flavius, and of the Talmud itself.

The Talmud assures us that forty years before the ruin and downfall of Jerusalem, that is, at the time of the death of Christ, awful signs were witnessed in the temple. The great door of bronze was rent in pieces. At the sight and the sound of all these horrors, the people arose to their feet and ran out of the temple, shouting: "Woe, woe unto us!" rending their garments in sign of grief and humiliation.

The high priests, though at heart shaken with terror,

nevertheless, went about among the people attempting as best they could to quiet them, lest, overcome by emotion, the people might rise up against them. They used, of course, every art and artifice to deceive the people. This violence of Nature must not be understood as a sign of God's disapproval of them. Oh, no! On the contrary, all these terrible things had happened because some of the friends of Jesus had come into the temple for the Passover and had thus defiled the house of God. Obdurate even until the end! It was a case of the blind leading the blind; yes, worse than this, it was a case of the hard-hearted and the evil-minded attempting to deceive the people against even the testimony of Nature itself. It was useless to attempt to go on with the ceremony of the sacrifice, and so the day, which should have been one of great rejoicing among the Jews of Jerusalem, was turned into one of desolation and of grief.

Apparition of the Dead

St. Matthew writes (xxvii, 52) that at the death of Jesus "the tombs were suddenly opened and many bodies which had been buried arose, came out of the tombs, entered Jerusalem and appeared to many," and authentic tradition confirms all this. St. Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, writes about the year 312: "Everything was overturned and upset at the time of the death of Christ. As Christ, before the dead Lazarus, exclaimed: 'Lazarus, come forth,' so at the time of His death Christ exclaimed: 'Come forth, O dead, from your tombs and thus testify to My power.'"

And so the dead came forth to reprove the living for the crime they had committed against Life itself.

The earthquake, like the darkness which had spread over the world, was not limited to Jerusalem. On the contrary, it was very widespread. It was felt violently all over Judea; in fact, all over Palestine, and it ruined many of the towns and villages in that place. It was felt, besides, all over Asia Minor and destroyed a large part of the city of Nicea, as we have already stated, according to the testimony of Phlegon. Tradition has it, and St. Francis seems to confirm the tradition, that the great fissures on Mount Alvernia in Italy were caused by an earthquake at the time of the death of Christ. Moreover, Baronius, whose word is not to be lightly taken, holds that the great rent in the sides of Mount Columbus, near Rieti, is to be attributed to the same cause. Similarly tradition says that the great fissures in the rock near Gaeta and another in the Province of Cagliari, and still another in Monserrat in Spain, all date to the time of the same event.

Finally, we have irrefutable proof of the greatness and the extent of the earthquake, which took place at the time of the death of Christ, in a monument in Naples, which is worthy of special notice. In the Museum of Naples there is a pedestal which was found in the excavations made in Pozzuoli. This pedestal has sculptured upon its surface fourteen female figures, which represent the fourteen cities of Asia destroyed by the earthquake at the time of Tiberius Cæsar. These fourteen cities were rebuilt by the order of the Emperor, and this

pedestal was intended to be the base of a great statue of Tiberius, thus expressing the gratitude of these fourteen cities towards the Emperor who had so benevolently come to their assistance.

The question now comes, when was this monument erected? It would seem that the pedestal at Naples was a replica of the statue erected in Rome near the temple of Venus, as Pliny seems to indicate. Now, the archæologists who have studied this monument well think that it must have been erected about the year 30 of the Christian era; that is, the year following the death of Jesus. This, therefore, would seem to be very clear proof that the earthquake felt in Jerusalem had very wide results, reaching, as we now see, according to these various witnesses, to cities in Asia far distant from Palestine.

Mysterious Voices Announcing the Death of Christ

As God, by means of the shepherds and the Magi, by the angels and the wonderful star, had announced to the world the birth of His Divine Son, so various prodigies and terrible signs declared to the world the death of the Redeemer. The awful darkness, the earthquake, the appearance of the dead in the streets of Jerusalem, were all signs of the wrath of God. But besides these, in various parts of the world, by the oracles revered by pagans, and by various other signs, the death of Christ was announced to all humanity.

Plutarch narrates at great length an incident which, to say the least, is extremely interesting in this connection. He writes that a certain friend of his had embarked

on a ship for Italy. He describes in detail that in the evening, as the vessel was nearing the islands of Ionia, a great tempest arose, driving the ship before it towards the island of Paxos while many of the ship's crew and the passengers were asleep. They were suddenly aroused by a great voice coming from the island near by shouting for Tamus. This Tamus was one of the crew, practically unknown to all. Again and again the voice came from the island calling, "Tamus! Tamus!" And so the crew aroused Tamus from his sleep. Hearing his name called loudly from the island, he shouted back: "Here I am." Whereupon the voice from the island shouted still louder: "When you come to Palos tell them that the great Pan is dead." Hearing this, Plutarch goes on to say, a great wonder fell upon all the passengers. The god Pan meant to them the great universal god.

Finally, when the ship came before Palos, Tamus went to the prow of the boat and shouted towards the island: "Great Pan is dead." Scarcely had he finished saying these words when they heard coming from Palos a great noise as of the sound of many voices. When the Emperor Tiberius heard of this in Rome, he sent for Tamus, and had him brought before him. When the Emperor had heard the story from the lips of the sailor, he was filled with curiosity and he gave orders to investigate as to who Pan was, and soon the wise men about him gave as their opinion that Pan was the son of Mercury and Penelope. Thus narrates Plutarch, and surely it is a most interesting incident. As we have seen, it took place at the time of the Emperor Tiberius, who

was the emperor at the time of the Crucifixion of Christ. Pagan philosophers recognized in the god Pan the god of all things. His death was the cause of wailing and of sorrow to those who heard the mysterious announcement. Surely, at least, here we see in figure and in symbol the death of the great Son of God, the real Ruler of the universe.

So by mysterious signs and strange voices the death of the Son of God was announced to all the world. Nature and the powers of darkness acknowledged that the Redeemer of the world had finished His work for the salvation of humanity.

The evening of the great Passover, which should have been a time of great rejoicing and jubilee, was in reality the saddest and most sorrowful part of the great day. The temple was deserted; the city was shaken by the earthquake, and the people were overwhelmed with terror. The hand of God had reached out in chastisement and the Jewish people began to feel the weight of the anger of Jehovah. It was a sad night, too, for the little flock of Christ, scattered and wandering, now that their Shepherd had been stricken. They had heard, it is true, the words of Christ foretelling His Resurrection, but to them it was all very vague and incomprehensible.

Our Blessed Lady, of course, knew well the full meaning of all these words of prophecy, and so in the midst of all her terrible grief she was sustained by the great hope of soon seeing again her risen Son. But the others had collapsed completely under the awful trial to which their faith had been put during this whole day, and so

they met in little groups, endeavoring to console one another in their utter prostration and misery. While they could not clearly and unmistakably realize the thought of a glorious Resurrection, still again and again they whispered to each other the words which would seem to indicate that the death of their Master was not the end of all their hopes. But in the midst of all the confusion which now reigned throughout the Holy City, they wandered about, not knowing whither to turn or where to go. So the hours passed, bringing finally the silence of the night and a few hours of quiet repose after all the terrible anxieties they had undergone.

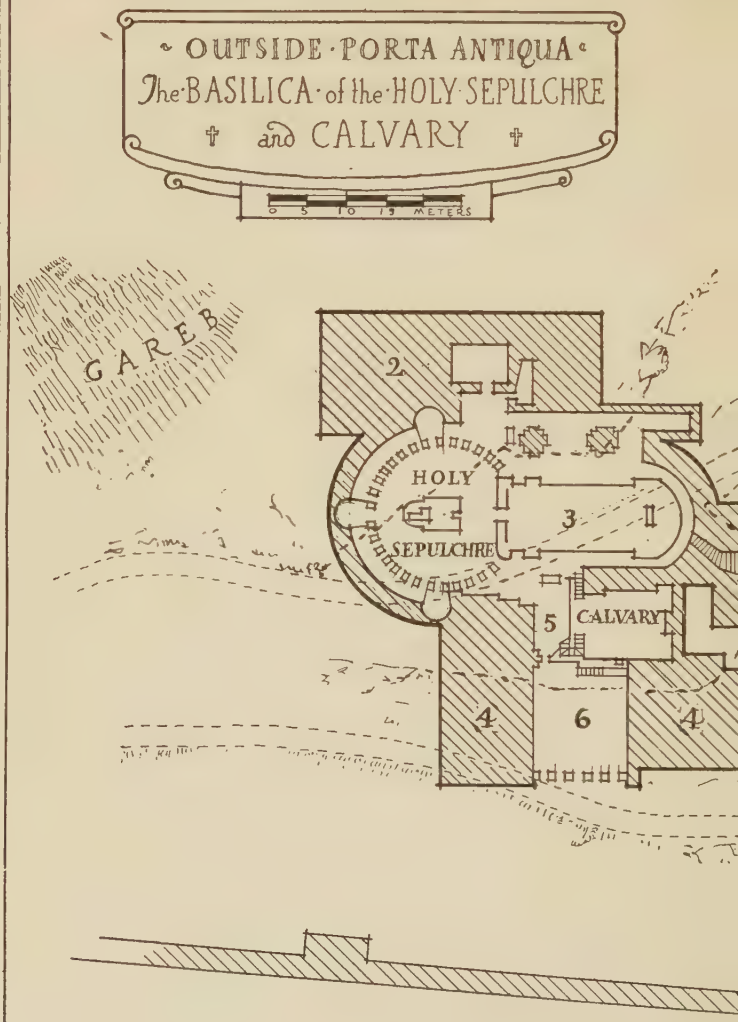
Morning broke and with the day the people began little by little to recover from the events of the preceding afternoon and evening. They tried to go about their daily tasks as usual, and they hoped that by occupying themselves thus they might forget the horrors of yesterday. And so the day wore on, and neither the Jewish people, nor the disciples, themselves, were able fully to realize that the great vigil had begun which would usher in the glorious day of the Resurrection.

The dawn of the third day was not now far away. The soldiers sent to guard the sepulchre had taken their place around it. How strange that the Pharisees who pretended to attach no weight to the prophecy of Christ regarding His Resurrection should nevertheless take the pains to surround the sepulchre with soldiers. How strange that these very soldiers in a few hours would be the first to witness the glorious return to life of the One they had believed silenced forever.

At last the glorious sun of the first Easter arose. Soon the stone which guarded the mouth of the sepulchre was violently hurled aside by unseen hands. The guards sprang to their feet and the hair of their heads stood up on end, and their eyes bulged from their sockets as they beheld at the door of the sepulchre the glorified form of Jesus Risen. Overwhelmed with terror they ran from the scene to report to their officers an event too clear to deny, and yet, to them, utterly inexplicable. While the officers listened to the report of the guard, word ran through the city that something extraordinary had happened in the early dawn which had terrified the Roman soldiery. At that very hour the pious women were making their way toward the sepulchre to embalm the body of Jesus, and there at the door of the sepulchre they beheld the flaming form of an angel who announced to them: "You seek Jesus of Nazareth Who was crucified; He is risen, He is not here." (St. Mark XVI, 16.)

The joy which suddenly filled their hearts urged them with precipitous haste to the Cenacle, where the Apostles, still timid, had gathered in prayer. The sight of the joyful faces of the women told the glad news, and instantly from the hearts of those hitherto frightened, terrified and almost doubting men, arose the Alleluia of the joy of the Resurrection. But what pen can describe such scenes as these?

For forty days He lived with His dear Apostles, walking with them through the fields of Galilee, confirming their faith and giving them explicit directions concerning the constitution and the foundation of that great Church,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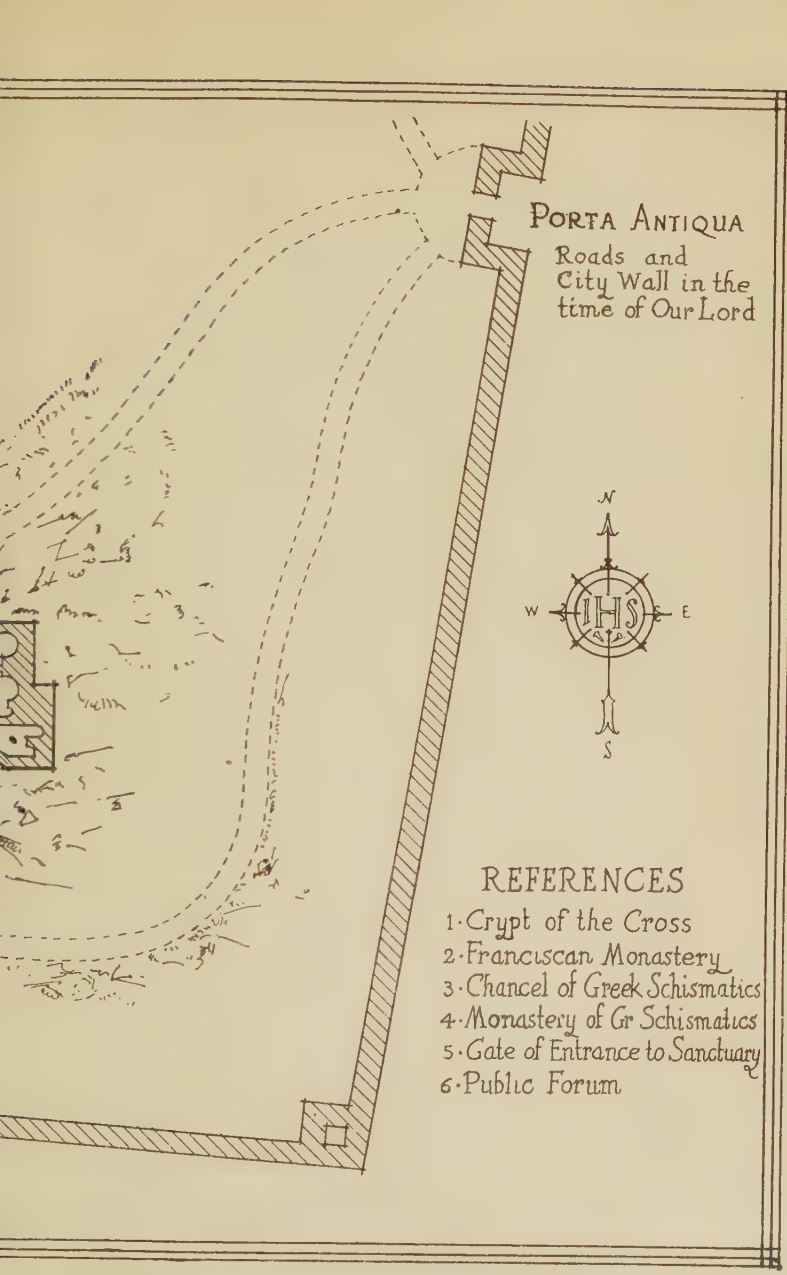
PORTA ANTIQUA
Roads and
City Wall in the
time of Our Lord
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REFERENCES
1·Crypt of the Cross
2·Franciscan Monastery
3·Chancel of Greek Schismatics
4·Monastery of Gr Schismatics
5·Gate of Entrance to Sanctuary
6·Public Forum

which should be His Kingdom on earth until the end of time. Once more He sat with them at table and spoke to them the words of life. He took their hands in His, and allowed them to touch His Sacred Wounds so that never again should doubt enter their souls. Again and again in the Cenacle He sat among them and unfolded the wonderful revelations which would constitute forever the glory of all those who had believed in Him. Oh, what a wonderful forty days, were those days spent at the feet of Christ learning the lessons which poured from the lips of the Son of God!

Finally, the end of those wonderful forty days had come. Once again He goes out of the Cenacle, following the same route which He had taken on the night of His Passion; down into the valley by the brook Cedron, stopping for a moment to look across at Gethsemane, not now in the sorrow of the evening of His Passion, but in glorious retrospect of all that the Passion had accomplished. He crosses the brook, enters through the gate and climbs the side of the hill of Olivet. Joyfully they mount the sacred hill and soon reach its summit, whence once again they look out upon the panorama which surrounds them, recalling for a moment all the scenes of the labors and the suffering of the Master. They kneel down upon the ground, their eyes lifted to the face of Christ. They hear for the last time the sacred lessons which He had reserved for them until that moment, and then, stretching out His hands above their bowed heads, He blessed them all. One word of final leave-taking and, while they look, behold His glorified form is lifted into

the air; it rises above them, shining with the glory of the sun; it rises and still rises until finally, enfolded in a brilliant cloud, He is lost to their view. And there they still knelt, their heads lifted towards Heaven, their eyes straining towards the great cloud into which He had disappeared. Then, lifting up their voices, they chanted the hymn of "Glory to God in the Highest." Immovable, they remained, looking still up into the great empyrean in the midst of which He had disappeared.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, their Lord and Master, had ascended into Heaven. But now the Apostles realized that His Kingdom would have no end; that His Church, the Kingdom of Truth which He had founded upon Peter and the other Apostles, would endure forever; that they would carry His Gospel to the ends of the earth, from sea to sea, over mountains and rivers and plains; that His Church would suffer even as He had suffered, but that it would ever be refreshed for new combats and fortified by prayer for new triumphs; that it would ever and ever be assaulted but never overcome, and, when time should be no more, that His Church, like its Divine Founder, would be crowned with His victory and partake of His eternal triumph in the Kingdom of God in Heaven.

O Jesu mi dulcissime,
Spes suspirantis animæ,
Te quærent piæ lacrimæ,
Et ardor mentis intimæ.

Gloria in altissimis Deo et beatissimæ Virgini Mariæ sint gratiæ.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Note 1

Catherine Emmerich and the Value of Her Meditations

Catherine Emmerich was born in a little village in the diocese of Münster, Germany, of poor and honest parents, the 8th of September, 1774. From her youth she was a pious and innocent girl, and in her early years she worked about the farm helping her parents with various domestic duties. At a very early age she began to narrate to her father wonderful visions which she had seen. Later she became a nun in the little village of Dulmen in Westphalia. When the convent there was suppressed, she went to live in a poor cottage in that place, which had been offered to her by pious friends. She died on the evening of the 9th of February, 1824. It was commonly believed that she had received the grace of the stigmata before her death. She wrote nothing herself, but she narrated her visions to those about her as she received them, and these were later collected by Clement Brentano. Her visions concerning the Passion of Our Lord took place in the later years of her life and are really a series of extraordinary incidents.

Now, we do not wish to have it understood that these narrations are of an absolutely true and precise character in all their details. Even pious and privileged souls like Catherine Emmerich, though enriched by many special graces from God, nevertheless have not the divine assistance in their revelations which the Prophets and Evangelists had. They are capable, on the contrary, of forgetting at times what they saw, and of being subject to human weakness like all the rest of the world. It is quite possible that they at times err in their descriptions of the events they have seen in ecstasy. Nevertheless, these revelations are not to be entirely brushed aside as of no value. In fact the Church, though not approving of them officially, holds them

in great regard. The visions of St. Bridget and of Catherine Emmerich in regard to the Sacred Passion, therefore, while very far from partaking of the inspired character of Holy Scripture, nevertheless may be read with great profit and real edification, both on account of the sanctity of these privileged souls, and on account of the sacredness of the mysteries which in some way they have been allowed to behold.

Note 2

The Day of Christ's Death

It is clearly indisputable that Christ died on the afternoon of a Friday, that during Saturday He reposed in the sepulchre, and that He arose the following morning, which was Sunday. These days have been clearly fixed by the Church from the very beginning, so that in the very first days of Christianity Friday was held as a day sacred to the commemoration of the death of Christ, and Sunday was a day of joy in which was commemorated the glory of His Resurrection.

The Jews observed the Sabbath as a festival day and during that day they were not permitted to do any servile work, nor even to prepare food. This custom was a prescription of the Mosaic law and was observed with great rigor. The food to be eaten on the Sabbath was prepared the day before, that is, on Friday, and for that reason the day was called the Parasceve, which means the preparation.

It is perfectly clear from the Sacred Text and the testimony of the Evangelists that Christ died on Friday, but on what Friday and in what month? The answer to this question will be found in the two following notes.

Note 3

The death of Our Lord took place on the 25th of March, the day of the Annunciation, and therefore the anniversary of His conception.

"It is the perpetual tradition of the Church," writes Benedict XIV, "that Christ died on the 25th of March, that is, on

the octave of the calends of April." Now, according to the Roman computation, the calends of April was the first of April, and therefore the 25th of March was the eighth day before the calends.

Tertullian writes: "The Passion of Our Lord took place under Tiberius Cæsar, the consuls of that time being Rubelius and Fusius, in the month of March at the time of the Passover, on the eighth day before the calends of April." It must be remembered that Tertullian was one of the most learned writers of his time and that he had seen with his own eyes the Acts of Pilate sent to the Emperor Tiberius recording the death of Christ. He had, moreover, consulted the archives of the Empire again and again on these and other similar matters, and had used the fruits of his research in his various letters to the Roman magistrates, to prove the truth of the Christian religion and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. As he was a contemporary of some of the disciples of the Apostles, he was constantly referring to the testimony of very early tradition to prove the truth of his assertions. His authority, therefore, on such matters is the very strongest.

St. Augustine writes: "Christ, therefore, died at the time when the two Gemini [Rubelius and Fusius] were consuls on the 25th of March." And again, in his tract on the Trinity, he says: "We have learned from the elders in the Church to believe that Christ died upon the 25th of March, the day also of His conception."

Lactantius affirms the same thing and almost in precisely the same words, so, also, St. John Chrysostom.

As a confirmation of all this we have a monument found in the Campo Verano in the year 1551. This is a marble statue of the celebrated and very learned St. Hippolytus, who was martyred at the beginning of the third century. This statue is now found in the Vatican library. Cut into the stone of the chair of the statue is the paschal canon of the year 222 and we read on this inscription: "Octavo kalendas Aprilis Passio Domini"; that is, 25th of March, the Passion of the Lord.

Moreover, the Roman Martyrology notes for the date, the 25th of March, "in Jerusalem, the commemoration of the good thief who, having given testimony of Christ on the Cross, deserved to hear from Him: 'This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.'" This is verified in other ancient Martyrologies, as can be seen in the work of the Bollandists. It is clear, therefore, that these Martyrologies concur in placing the death of the good thief on the 25th of March, and so implicitly declare that the death of Our Lord took place on that day. We hold, therefore, as certain that on the 25th of March Our Blessed Lord died upon the Cross. In fact, the contrary sentence sustained by Tostatus in the time of Eugenius IV was condemned as erroneous.

It is true that the Church does not celebrate the Pasch on that date but observes it on the Sunday following the Jewish Passover, but that was a custom established even in apostolic times for very grave and weighty reasons, as we shall now see.

Note 4

The death of Our Lord occurred on the day of the unleavened bread, the 15th Nisan, the solemnity of the Hebrew Passover.

The Hebrews computed their months according to the phases of the moon. Every month began with a new moon and the full moon took place on the 15th of the month. This first month established by Moses was that in which the full moon came after the vernal equinox, that is, on the 21st of March, but as the changes of the moon were not coincident with the apparent changes of the sun it happened that at times the first month came earlier, at other times, later. This is what happens precisely in establishing the date of Easter.

The beginning of each month was announced by the priests with the sound of the trumpet and was reckoned as a festive day. The first month, Nisan, was also considered by the Jews to be more solemn than the other months, because during that month was the commemoration of their liberation from slavery in Egypt. It is well here to recall that the liberation of the Jewish

people from Egyptian slavery was a prophetic figure of the Redemption from the slavery of sin wrought by the Messias. The figure, therefore, was completely fulfilled by the death of Christ on the 15th Nisan, that is, the day of Passover of the Jewish people. This day, the 15th Nisan, was called the day of unleavened bread and also the Pasch. Josephus Flavius testifies to this very clearly, when he says: "In the feast of the solemnity of the unleavened bread which we call the Pasch"; and St. Luke (XXII, 1) says: "Now the feast of unleavened bread which is called the Pasch was at hand." It is, therefore, clear from the testimony of the Evangelist, as well as from that of the earliest sacred writers, that Christ, like all the people of the Jewish nation, celebrated on the 14th Nisan the preparation of the feast of the Passover prescribed by Moses. After the festival of preparation He established at the Last Supper the Blessed Eucharist. It is well to note that various writers differ in their explanations as to why Christ celebrated the Passover on the first day of the unleavened bread, but following the doctrine of Benedict XIV, St. Thomas, and the Catechism of the Council of Trent, there is no need of confusion or difficulty in reconciling the various texts. The natural day, that is, beginning with the morning and ending with the evening of the 15th Nisan, was called the day of the Passover, but among the Jews, as among ourselves, the religious day was reckoned from the evening of the day before to the evening of the day itself. The fact that Christ ate the Passover on the evening of the 14th Nisan need in no way militate against the idea of His legal observance of the Pasch, since the meal took place within the period of time which constituted the day of the Passover reckoned in a liturgical way. Whatever apparent discrepancy appears on the surface from the different wording of the Evangelists, disappears when we understand the customs of the Hebrew people, and, it remains perfectly clear that Christ instituted the Eucharist on the 14th Nisan and died upon the Cross on the 15th Nisan, the solemn day of the Hebrew Passover.

The question may now be asked, why does not the Church of Christ celebrate Easter on the precise day of the month when Christ's Resurrection took place instead of following the Hebrew custom, and celebrating it on the Sunday after the full moon of the spring equinox? Briefly the reason is this:

The Hebrews celebrated their Passover at the time of the full moon after the vernal equinox (21st of March), because they recalled on that day their liberation from the slavery in Egypt.

Now, the liberation of the Hebrew people from Egyptian slavery was the figure and the prediction of the liberation of the whole human race from the slavery of the Devil, accomplished by the works and deeds of Jesus Christ, the Messias. The Apostles, unwilling to separate the realization of the great prophecies from the predictions themselves, fixed the Christian celebration of the Pasch or Resurrection at the same time as the Hebrew celebration. There was this difference, however, that while the Hebrews celebrated their liberation on the 15th Nisan, the Apostles and their immediate successors fixed the time of the Christian Passover, or Easter, for the following Sunday.

Early in the history of the Church, some of the churches of Asia Minor preferred to celebrate the Christian Pasch on the same date as the Hebrew Passover, and for some time there was a grave dispute between some of the Oriental Churches and Rome on this point. This question was finally settled at the Nicene Council; and therefore since the fourth century the Church has preserved the Roman custom and discipline with regard to the celebration of Easter.

Note 5

The Year of the Death of Our Lord, the Twenty-Ninth of the Christian Era and the Thirty-Third of His Age

At first sight these dates would seem to be contradictory. As a matter of fact they are nothing of the sort. The popular opinion that the Christian era began exactly with the year of the birth of Christ and that, therefore, it coincides with the years of

His life, has been abandoned for some time by all the learned writers. The only dispute now is whether our era began four or five years previous to the birth of Christ. Most probably it was four years.

In a few words we shall here show, first, that Jesus died in His thirty-third year; second, that the year of His death was the twenty-ninth year of our era, thus making the beginning of our era four years before the birth of Christ; third, we shall briefly explain how it came to pass that there is a discrepancy between the date of the birth of Christ and the first year of our era.

A. Christ Died in His Thirty-Third Year

This has been the constant tradition of the Church. Besides that, we have the testimony of the Evangelists themselves. St. Luke expressly says that when Jesus went to be baptized by St. John in the Jordan He was about thirty years old (St. Luke III, 23). We know, also, that according to the regulations of the Hebrew religious customs no one was allowed to teach publicly until he had arrived at the age of thirty. After these data recorded by St. Luke, we find the Evangelists note three distinct Passovers celebrated by Our Blessed Lord, in three successive years and finally recording His death upon the third Passover. In fact, if we go into detail in this matter we can readily deduce that from the time of His conception, the 25th of March, until the time of His death, again the 25th of March, exactly thirty-three years had transpired.

B. Christ Died in the Twenty-Ninth Year of Our Era

Tertullian, St. Augustine, and Lactantius all affirm that the death of Christ took place under the consuls Gemini. This was the Roman method of computing dates, namely, by indication of the consuls of the time. We see this on innumerable monuments of early Rome preserved to this day.

Now it is beyond doubt and admitted by all that the consulates of the two Gemini were in the first year of the two hundred

and second Olympiad, which is precisely the twenty-ninth year of our era.

We know, moreover, that Herod died in the month of March, three years before our era. Josephus Flavius gives positive testimony of this fact. Now, it is also clear, that if Herod died three years before our era began, Jesus must have been born at least about four years before that epoch. How otherwise could a sufficient time be given for such incidents as the adoration of the Magi, the presentation in the temple, the flight into Egypt and the slaughter of the innocents? It is clear, therefore, that since Christ was born in the days of Herod the King, as the Evangelists write, He must have been born about four years before the beginning of our era.

C. The Error with Regard to the Beginning of the Christian Era

We know that up to the sixth century it was not the custom generally to compute the years from the birth of Our Lord. Different nations and different places had their own methods of dating events. The Hebrews, for instance, had the custom at one time of dating their years from the creation of the world, but when they passed under the yoke of different conquerors — the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans — they adopted more or less the various calendars used by their conquerors.

The Greeks made their calculations and their dates according to the Olympiad which began about seven hundred and seventy-six years before our own era. Each Olympiad contained four ordinary years, because every fourth year the great games of Greece took place. Besides this general method of Greek computation there were several others used in different parts of Greece at various times.

Rome computed her dates from the foundation of the city, which, according to Varro, took place seven hundred and fifty-four years before the Christian era. Besides this general date there were dates marked by the terms of the various consuls; later still time was reckoned according to the reign of the different emperors.

It is uncertain when they computed the first day of their year. At different times and in different places the method varied. According to some, it was fixed at the time of the winter solstice; according to others, the vernal equinox. So it is clear that with all these different systems of calendar calculation, fixing any date was a very complicated thing. Therefore we are not surprised that the fixing of the date of any event in ancient chronology presents very grave difficulties.

It was Dionysius Exiguus who, in the sixth century, introduced into Italy the system of computing the date of events from the year of the birth of Christ. Unfortunately, Dionysius, though diligent enough in his calculations, nevertheless made several serious errors, due, no doubt, to the fact that, living in the midst of the invasions of the barbarians, he had not at hand sufficient information to guide him precisely in his studies regarding Chronology. In the course of time Charlemagne introduced the Italian system into France, and little by little, this method of computation from the supposed time of the birth of Christ spread throughout Christendom, just as it had been invented by Dionysius. The error has never since been officially corrected. Naturally, at present, the matter of a difference of three or four years in so many centuries amounts practically to very little; nevertheless it is interesting to know the facts.

Note 6

Incidents of the Crucifixion

St. John narrates that it was the Jewish custom to break the limbs of the crucified, and thus to secure their death and burial on the same day as the crucifixion. The soldiers followed this custom with regard to the two thieves, but when they came to the Body of Jesus, seeing that He was already dead, they did not break His limbs. "But one of the soldiers opened His side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and water." (St. John xix, 34.) In the meantime, Joseph of Arimathea had obtained permission from Pilate to take away the Body of Jesus, and as St. Matthew records, having taken the Body, he wrapped

it up in a white winding sheet and placed it in a new sepulchre which had been hewn out of the rock. (St. Matthew XXVII, 59–60.) The testimony of the Evangelist is in perfect accord with the Jewish custom. The bodies of those crucified were not allowed to remain on the cross during the Sabbath, but had to be taken down and buried, together with the instruments of their crucifixion.

On the south side of the hill of Golgotha, between Calvary and the wall of Jerusalem, there is a grotto formed by the cutting away of the stone. In that were buried the bodies of the two thieves with their crosses, and also the Cross of Jesus. By special favor, Joseph of Arimathea was permitted by Pilate to bury the Body of Christ in his own tomb on the opposite side of Golgotha. The Jews closed up the sepulchre with a huge stone, and, having sealed it, placed a guard about it. They evidently had not forgotten the words of Christ foretelling His Resurrection. These very soldiers were to give irrefutable testimony of Christ's Resurrection. Overcome with terror at the sight of the risen Christ, in fear and trembling, they were the first to testify to the great miracle of the Resurrection, and their testimony naturally is all the stronger because they were sent there precisely to guard against any conspiracy among the Apostles to take the Body away. It is perfectly clear that the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Christ, the Apostles, and several hundred people who were numbered among the first Christians, and also, thousands, who at the preaching of the Apostles became followers of Christ, would not be likely to forget the locations of those scenes of the tragedy of Calvary, among them the sepulchre of Christ and the grotto where the Cross and the instruments of the Passion were placed. For the moment they had to face the fury of the Jews, and therefore they would not publicly expose themselves to the persecutions of the time by any public veneration of these sacred places and sacred objects.

About forty years after the death of Christ, that is to say, the seventieth year of the Christian era, Jerusalem was besieged and utterly destroyed by the command of Titus. The Christians

on that occasion, mindful of the prophecy of Christ, abandoned the Holy City and retired in safety beyond the Jordan. After the destruction of the city, they came back to Jerusalem and found that though the rest of Jerusalem had been devastated the Cenacle on Sion remained practically intact. In the year 133 of our era, a new and terrible revolution of the Hebrew people brought down upon them the awful vengeance of the Emperor Hadrian and this time, the Romans, to make further uprisings impossible, utterly destroyed whatever there was left of Jerusalem.

Abolishing even the name of the Holy City, they built upon the site a new city which they called after the Emperor, "*Elia*," and which they peopled with soldiers and with strangers.

By this time the holy places and the sepulchre of Christ were completely buried under an enormous mass of wreckage, the ruins of the city, and over the sites were planted gardens and groves. Above the hill of Calvary they erected the statue of Jupiter, while over the Holy Sepulchre was erected a statue to the goddess Venus. The Roman soldiery knew very well the site of the holy places and this burial of them under the tremendous masses of the ruins of the Holy City was intended to obliterate the very memory of them. The fact is, something of course they never could foresee, that by placing above Calvary the statue of Jove, and above the sepulchre the statue of Venus, they were really marking the site of the sacred places for future generations.

The Christians looked on helpless, but they and their bishops took note of what was happening, and as we learn from Eusebius they preserved the knowledge of the location of these holy spots with the greatest precision. Later when the mother of Emperor Constantine, St. Helena, came to Jerusalem, the bishop of the city could bring her straight to the spot where the holy sepulchre was situated, and to the top of Calvary where Christ's Cross had been erected. She simply gave orders to pull down the statues of Jove and Venus, and to excavate in the ruins, to find there the Holy Sepulchre of the Lord.

This was in the year 323 and 324 of our era. When finally the work of excavation was finished, St. Helena saw not only the sepulchre of Christ, but the grotto in which had been placed the three crosses. The title itself could not be found in that place, and therefore the doubt arose as to which was the real Cross of Christ. We have already described how the true Cross was finally revealed by a wonderful miracle, which restored to perfect health a woman who had been almost at the point of death.

The news of this discovery of the Cross of Christ and of the sacred places flashed like lightning throughout the whole empire. From all parts of the world, wherever the Christian faith had reached, came requests for portions of the Cross. Constantine, by public decree, prohibited the use of the Cross as an instrument of punishment and gave orders for the construction of a great monument to be built above the sepulchre where the Body of Christ had been laid.

All this we know from the testimony of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived contemporaneously with these events, and later was bishop of the Holy City. We have besides a clear proof of all this in the words of Eusebius of Cæsarea.

A part of the Cross was enclosed in a reliquary of silver, together with the title, and was placed by St. Helena in a special chapel of the Basilica of Constantine in Jerusalem.

St. Sylvia of Aquitaine, on her return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land about the year 388, gives a most interesting description of the events and ceremonies which took place in Jerusalem during Holy Week of that time. The precious volume containing this most interesting description was found in the library of Arezzo about the year 1887.

"The faithful," she says, "passed all day Thursday and Friday in prayers and hymns and in the reading of the sacred texts. In the early morning of Good Friday, led by their bishop, they walked from Gethsemane up to the great Basilica. They then dispersed for a few hours, many of them going up to Sion to pray before the column of the flagellation. The chair of the bishop was placed at the top of Golgotha, behind the place

which was occupied by the Cross of Christ. Before him was spread a great table covered with linen, and the deacons brought out and laid upon this table the Sacred Wood of the Cross and the title. These the bishop and the deacons held in their hands, and the people came to kiss the relics and venerate them. So the worshippers passed by, one by one, bowing low in the veneration of the Cross, touching it with their foreheads, and showing it the deepest affection and veneration." This description reveals to us that even as far back as the fourth century the ceremony which we observe to-day on Good Friday was observed by the Christians.

St. Sylvia goes on to narrate that afterwards, that is from midday until three o'clock in the afternoon, the people listened to the reading of the psalms and the lessons, and the various sacred writings which predicted or described the Passion of the Lord.

It is interesting to note the testimony of Antoninus of Piacenza, who also left a description of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land about the year 570. Among other things, he says: "I saw with my own eyes, and held in my own hands, and kissed, the title which was placed above the head of Jesus, on which was written: 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.'"

About the year 614 the Persians invaded Jerusalem and took it by storm. The inhabitants of the city were put to death by thousands, and over three hundred monasteries and chapels were destroyed, among them the Basilica of Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre. Not content, moreover, with this barbarous destruction of the holy places, the Persians took away with them the relics of the Passion and the Cross of Our Blessed Lord.

A few years later the Emperor Heraclius, at the head of an army, advanced to meet the Persian invaders, and in three terrible battles he finally overwhelmed them and put them to flight. As a condition of peace he demanded the restoration to him of the relics of the Cross, and with these sacred relics in his hands, he entered Jerusalem in triumph. At once he began to

rebuild the sacred places. With solemn ceremony he restored the relics to the places where they were formerly enshrined. At a certain point, however, in the procession he was stopped and firmly held as if by some unseen hand. He tried to proceed, but could not, and he was filled with consternation, wondering why this happened. Then the patriarch turned to him and said: "See, your Majesty, how you are robed in precious garments which are not consonant with the humility of the Cross of Christ." Heraclius understood at once. He laid aside his royal cloak and took off his crown. Wearing a simple garment, barefooted, he again proceeded towards the Basilica. This time his passage was entirely uninterrupted and he entered the great church singing hymns and canticles to the Cross of Christ. Thus, he deposited once more in the place assigned to them the sacred relics.

Scarcely was Jerusalem again risen from her ruins when from the south arose another terrible scourge. The Arabs, who had accepted the religion of Mohammed, marched forth to conquer all those who did not accept the Mohammedan doctrine. In the year 637 they besieged and occupied Jerusalem under their leader, Omar. As soon as possible the relic of the Cross and the other precious relics of the Passion were transferred to Constantinople, and the hope of the Mohammedans to possess them was thwarted.

To-day the title, a thorn from the crown, and one of the nails, are all secure in the Church of the Holy Cross in Rome. The title bears the evident character of its authenticity, although the wood is quite parched, but one can distinguish very clearly even to-day the three inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The inscriptions are cut into the wood of the title and betray the haste in which the letters were made. It is guarded in a beautifully carved reliquary of gilded silver, and is visible from either side through an encasement of glass. It is certainly a most precious relic and one whose history has been traced from century to century.

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